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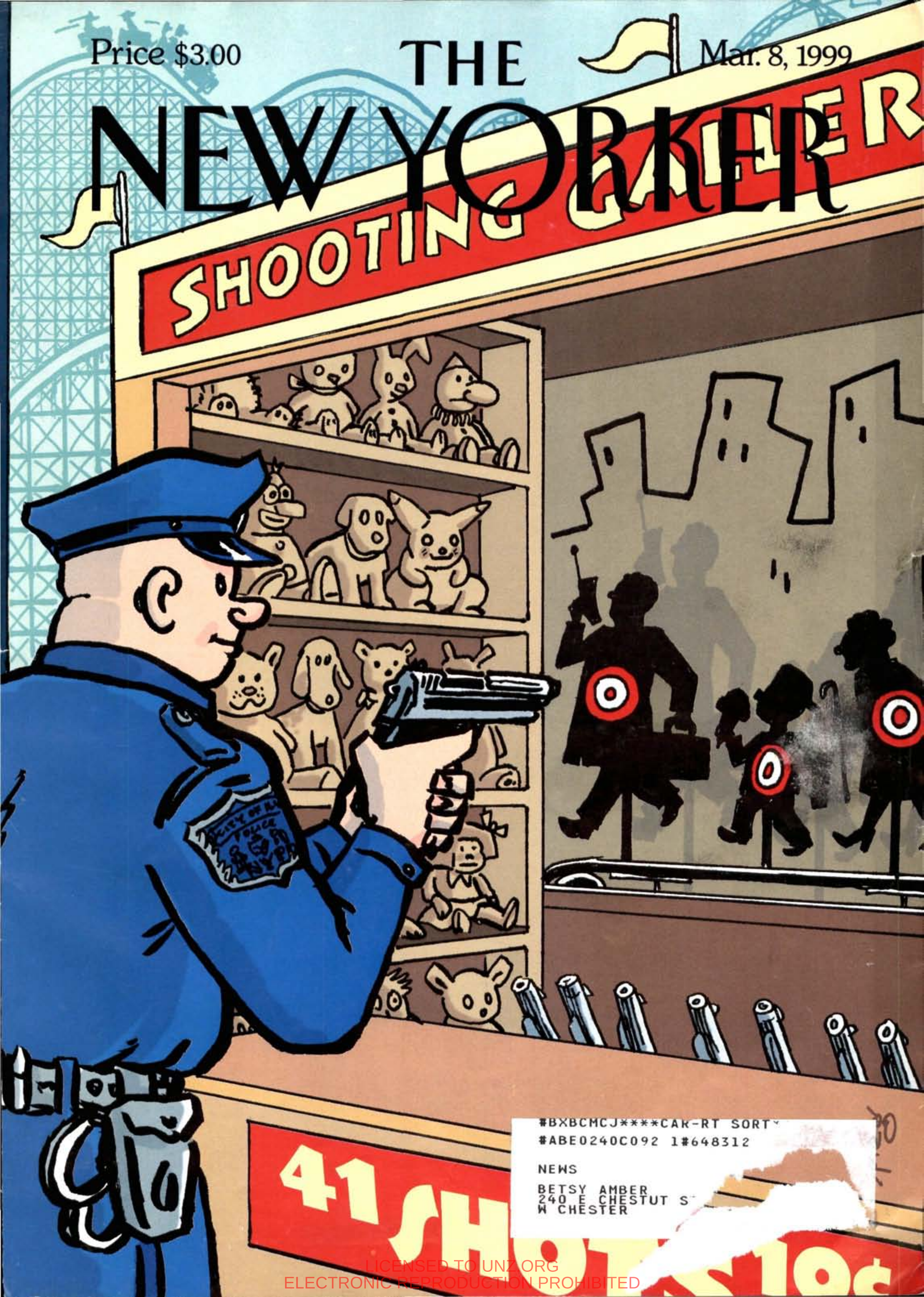
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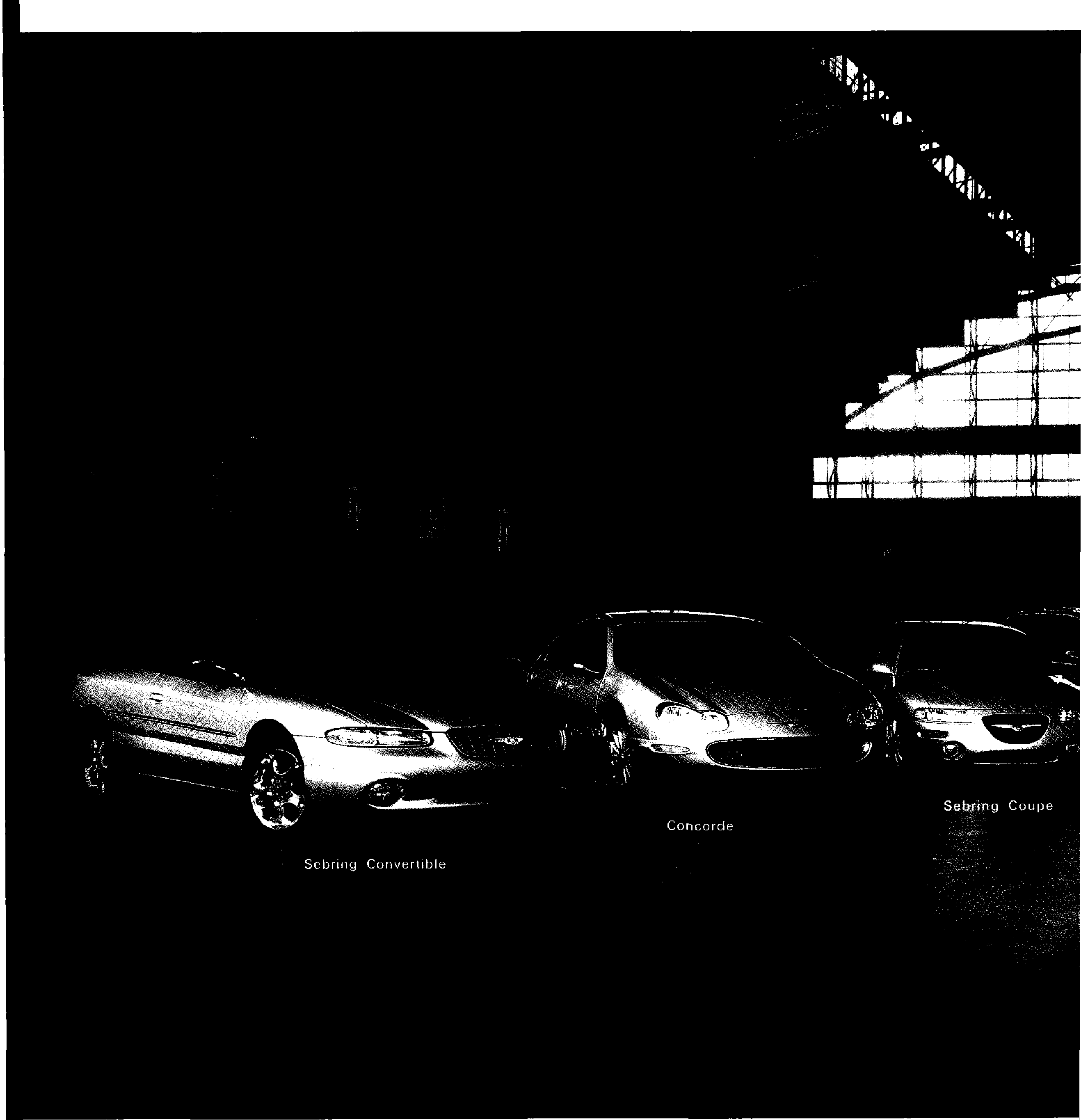
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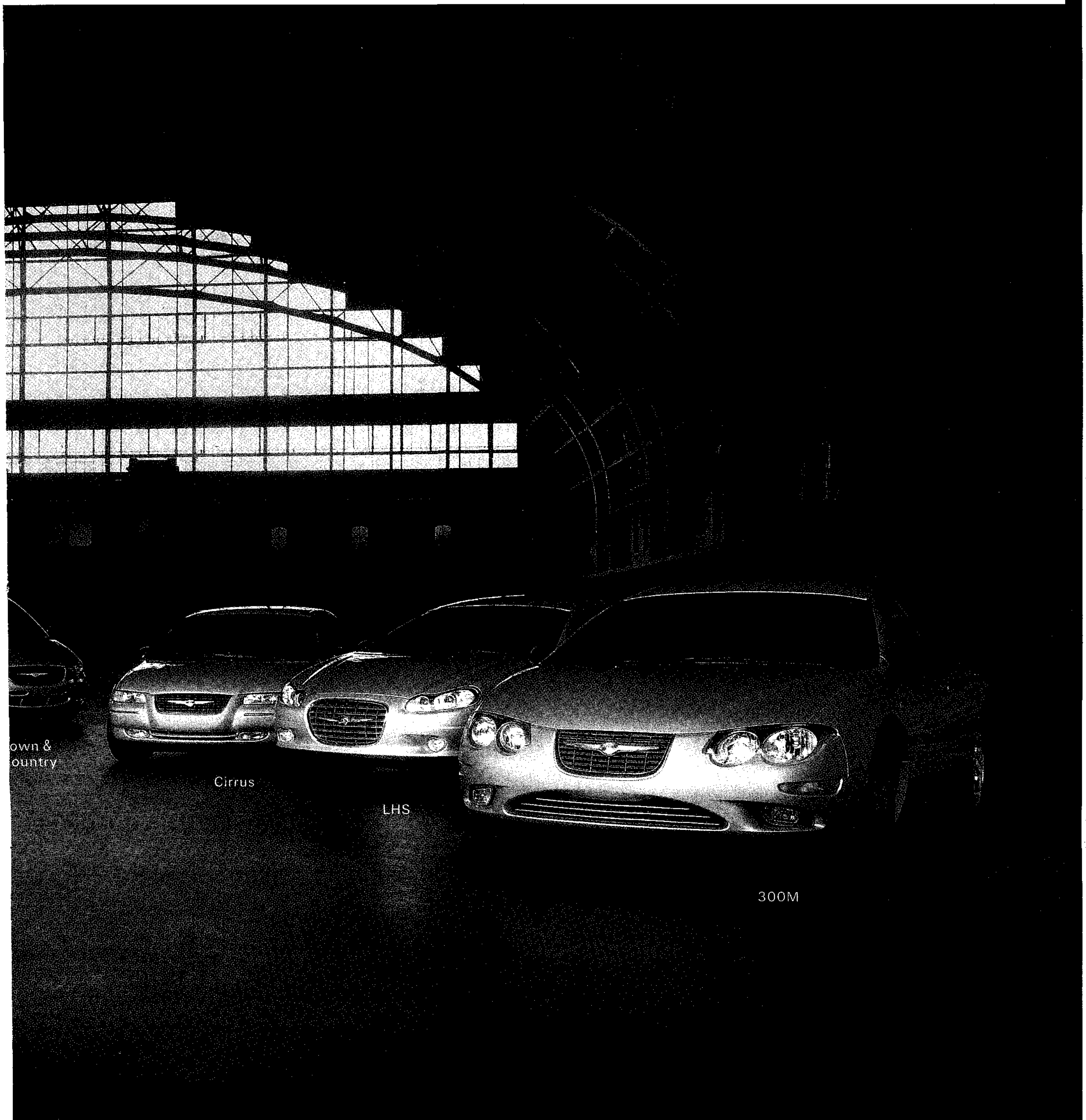
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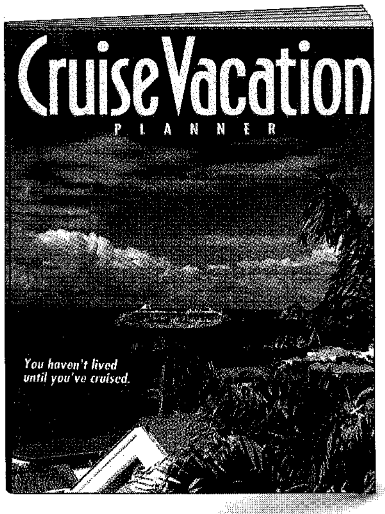

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THE NEW YORKER

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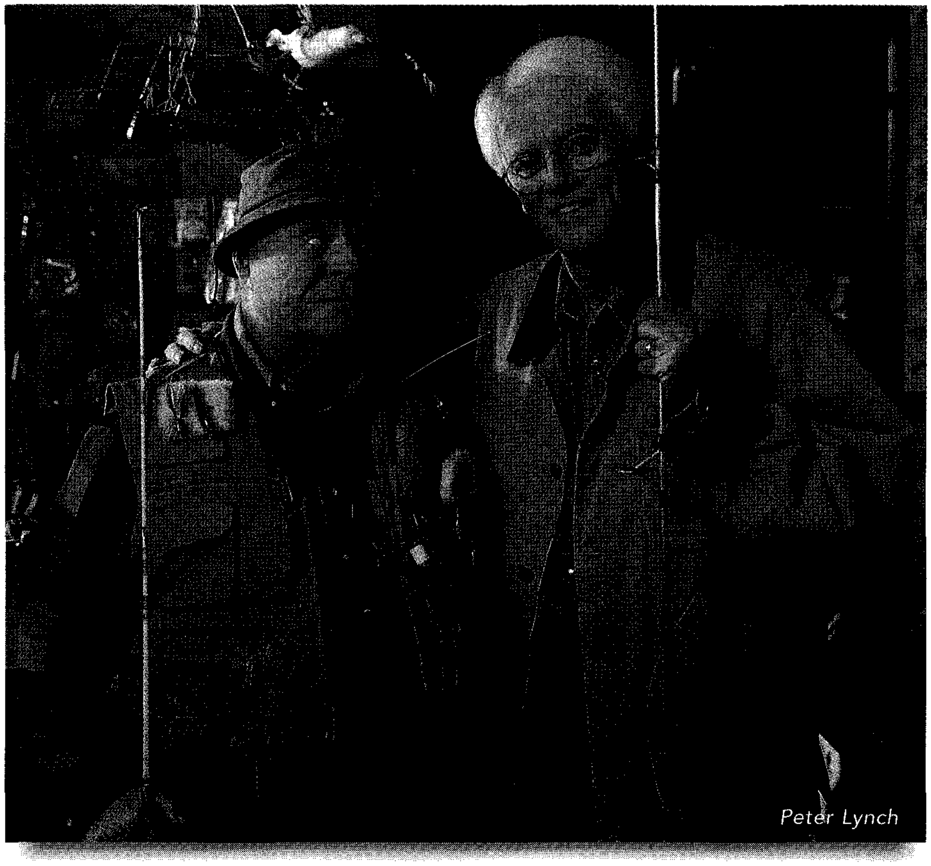
THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly (except for six combined issues: Feb. 22 & Mar. 1, Apr. 26 & May 3, June 21 & 28, Aug. 23 & 30, Oct. 18 & 25, Dec. 27 & Jan. 3) by The Condé Nast Publications Inc., 20 W. 43rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Vol. LXXV, No. 2, March 8, 1999. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian Publication Mail Sales Product Agreement No. 190969. Canadian goods-and-services-tax registration number R123242885. Registered as a newspaper at the British Post Office. Subscription rates: In U.S. and possessions, one year, $42.00; two years, $72.00. In Canada, one year, $90.00 (includes GST and HST where applicable). In Germany, one year, DM290. Mail orders to: IP Internationale Presse, Distribution & Marketing GmbH, Waldstr. 70, D-63128 Dietzenbach, Germany. Other foreign subscriptions, one year, $112.00, payable in advance.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The New Yorker, Box 56447, Boulder, CO 80328-6447. PRINTED IN U.S.A.



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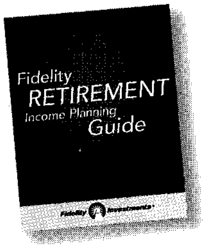

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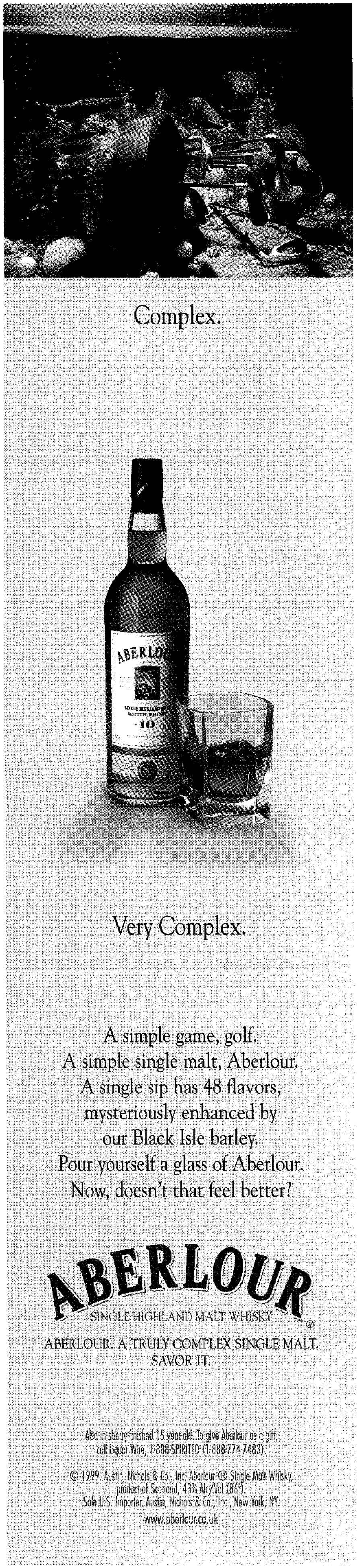

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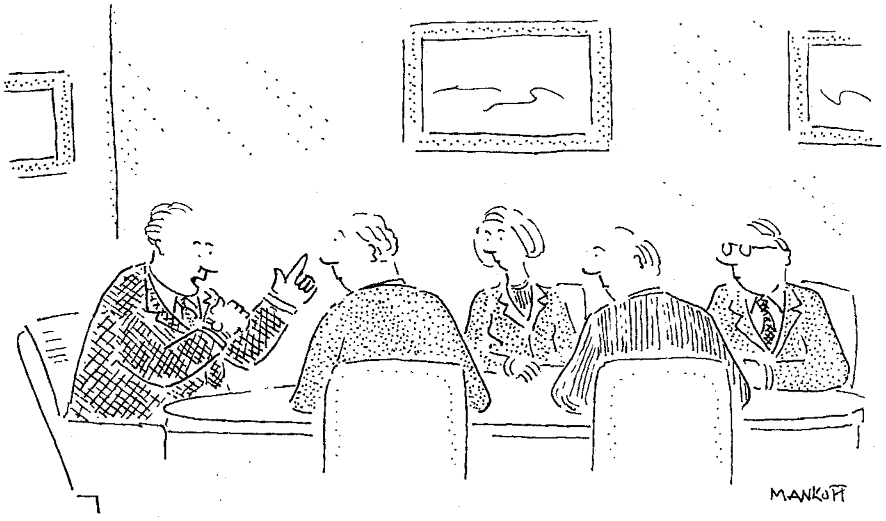
ROZ CHAST (The Back Page, p. 96) has published several collections of cartoons and has illustrated four children's books, including "Meet My Staff." ♦



"O.K., on my signal we're going to shift from pre-millennial to post-millennial thinking."

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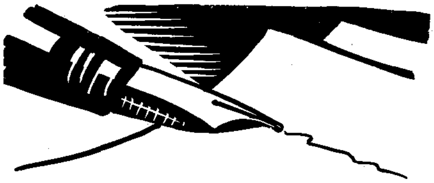

FIRST, DO NO HARM

In "When Doctors Make Mistakes" (February 1st), a surgical resident, Atul Gawande, assumes personal responsibility for some egregious errors; ironically, his article illustrates how the system of graduate medical education is responsible for them. The prevailing philosophy of medical education can be summed up as "See one, do one, teach one." It is a gospel that accepts error as an inevitable part of the learning experience, whatever the cost to the patient, and, because of it, Gawande felt compelled to proceed with a tracheostomy while knowing that he was ill prepared. The culture of surgical training does not encourage inexperienced residents to ask for help or assistance, lest they be seen as weak ignoramuses. The doyens of surgery have a perfect opportunity to embrace a change in their system—New York State laws enacted as a result of the death of Libby Zion, in 1984, which reduced the number of hours that surgical residents are required to work—but they have refused. As the *Times* has reported, there is flagrant disregard for these laws. With rational work hours and supervision of residents, errors can be reduced to an absolute minimum: it is time for the surgical establishment to respect the law.

BERTRAND M. BELL, M.D.
Distinguished University Professor
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
of Yeshiva University
Bronx, N.Y.

As a registered nurse in an academic hospital, I can confirm Dr. Gawande's reporting: every day, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists, and their students make mistakes. Some are fairly innocuous, some grave. As Gawande makes clear, blame and castigation are not remedies for hospital error. The remedies are checks and balances, taking responsibility for one's actions, acknowledging the human mistakes that inevitably occur, and learning from them rather than hiding from them. We aim for perfection. If you want to meet a bunch of anal-retentive, super-organized, self-critical people, get acquainted with a hospital's staff. But for patients, it pays to be vigilant. And if a trusting, mutually supportive relationship can be formed among staff, patients, and families, the margin of error decreases.

DEBORAH STRAUSS, R.N.
Austin, Texas

DEALING WITH DRUGS

Marcus Laffey ("Inside Dope," February 1st) describes the reality of the war on drugs in his last sentence: "No matter how often the whistle blows, the game is never over." But the fact that the war on drugs cannot be won is not the fault of the cops. Drug use will remain an intractable problem as long as we keep trying to treat it as a law-enforcement problem rather than the medical and social problem it is.

STEVE WELLCOME
Bolton, Mass.

Mr. Laffey notes a commonly held contempt among plainclothes officers for his days of working "in the bag," that is, in uniform on patrol. But on patrol is where the blight of narcotics manifests itself in things other than the mundane buy-and-bust operations that Laffey carries out. A uniformed patrol officer sees the vicious robberies for drug money, the drug-related homicides, and the domestic disputes when a mother tires of her son's crack dealing. So Laffey's account is accurate but doesn't show the drug trade's pervasive, destructive force not only among self-initiated members of the drug culture but within infested neighborhoods as a whole. That kind of accounting of a police officer's work would allow the public to understand a world that they would probably never see any other way.

POLICE OFFICER BRANDON DEL POZO
Uniformed Narcotics Initiative
Brooklyn, N.Y.

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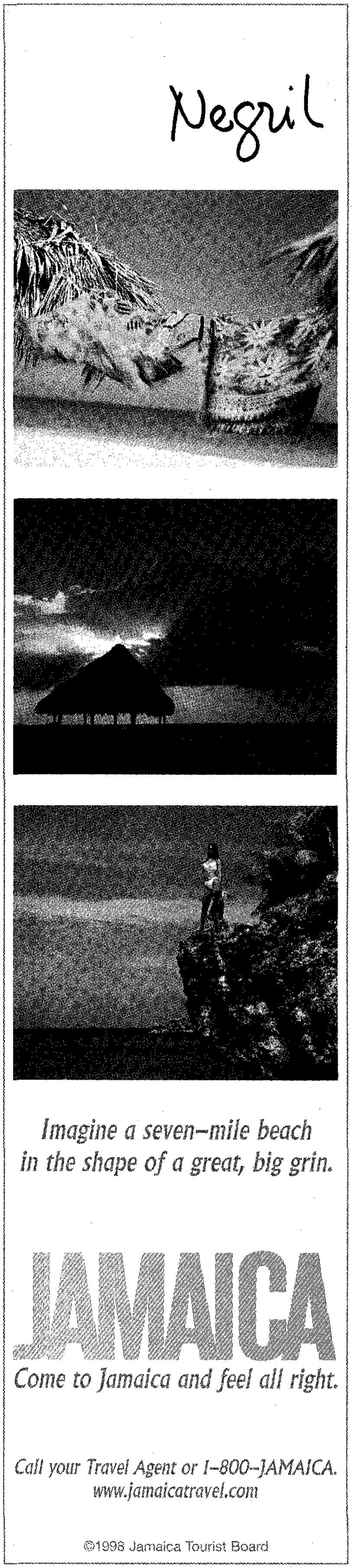
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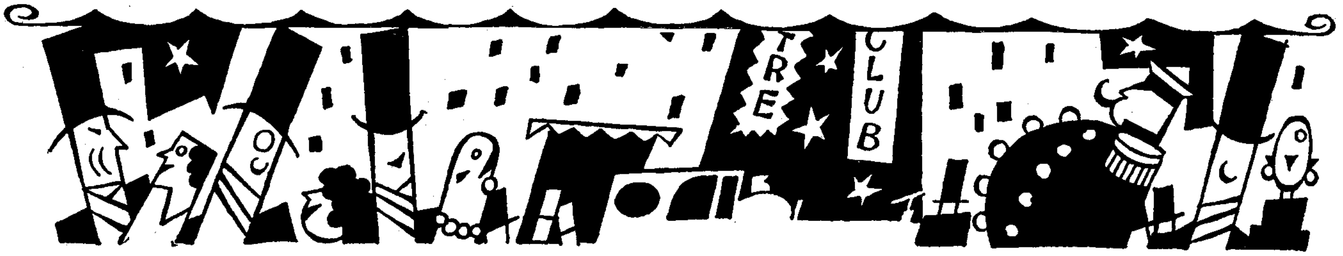


THE THEATRE

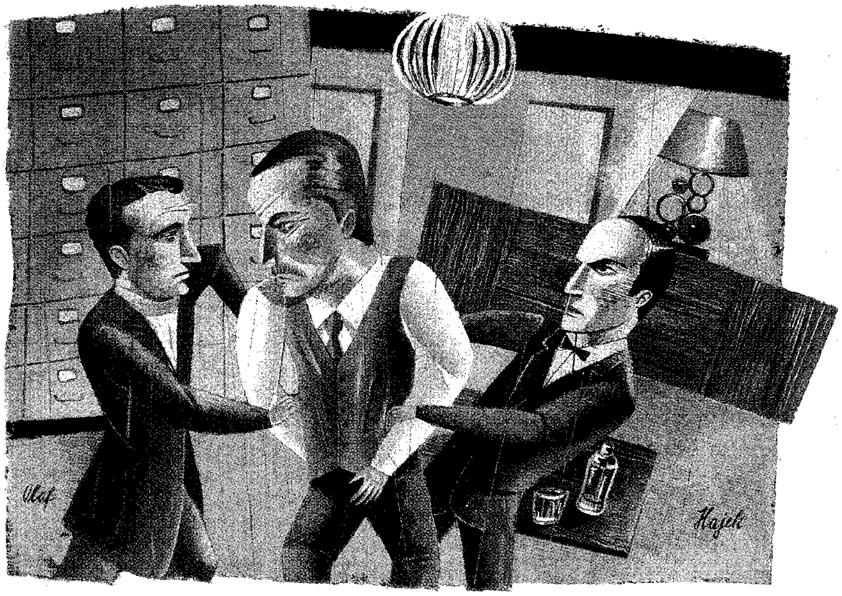
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Annie Get Your Gun—Bernadette Peters stars as the sharpshooter Annie Oakley, in Irving Berlin's 1946 musical. With Tom Wopat. Directed by Graciela Daniele. Two previews on March 3. Opens March 4 at 6:30. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Penny Arcade—The performance artist presents her latest solo work, "Bad Reputation." March 4-7 at 8:30. Continues through March 21. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

Band in Berlin—A musical about the popular German sextet the Comedian Harmonists, three of whom were Jewish, who were banned by the Nazis on the ground that they were bad for German morale. They are portrayed by the sextet Hudson Shad. In previews through March 6. Opens March 7 at 6:30. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)



"The Hothouse," by Harold Pinter, at the Atlantic.

Betty's Summer Vacation—A summer share turns bad, in a new comedy by Christopher Durang. Directed by Nicholas Martin. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Clarence Darrow Tonight!—A one-man show about the famous lawyer, written by and starring Laurence Luckinbill. Previews March 3-6. Opens March 7 at 3 and continues through March 21. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

Closer—Natasha Richardson leads the cast in the Royal National Theatre's production of a new play by Patrick Marber, which examines the tangled relationship of four friends. Previews begin March 9. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

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Everybody's Ruby—Thulani Davis's new drama, set in Florida in 1952, centers on the murder of a prominent white doctor by a married black woman. Phylicia Rashad stars as the writer Zora Neale Hurston, who comes to town to report on the trial. In previews through March 7. Opens March 8 at 8. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Halfway Home—From the New Group, a drama by Diane Bank, about a woman who returns to her family in Iowa after ten years of living in New York City. Opens March 3 at 8. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

He Who Says Yes/He Who Says No—The National Asian American Theatre Company's staging of rarely performed companion works by Bertolt Brecht. Previews begin March 5. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. For information about tickets, call 718-623-1672.)

The Lion in Winter—James Goldman's 1966 play stars Laurence Fishburne as Henry II and Stockard Channing as Eleanor of Aquitaine. Michael Mayer is the director. In previews. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 719-1300.)

Macbeth—Bill Camp and Elizabeth Marvel lead the cast in Theatre for a New Audience's production of Shakespeare's tragedy. The director is Ron Daniels. Previews begin March 9. (American Place Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Night Must Fall—Matthew Broderick plays a psychopath in a National Actors Theatre revival of Emlyn Williams's 1935 thriller, directed by John Tillinger. Judy Parfitt and J. Smith-Cameron are also in the cast. In previews through March 7. Opens March 8 at 6:30. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Red—In Chay Yew's latest drama, an American writer revisits her native China during the Cultural Revolution. David Petrarca is the director. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

The Seagull—A Target Margin staging of Chekhov's play, directed by David Herskovits. Opens March 3 at 8. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 358-3657.)

Via Dolorosa—The playwright David Hare performs his new one-man play, inspired by his 1997 trip to Israel. Stephen Daldry is the director. Previews begin March 5. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Admissions—A group of university students who've come together to protest tuition hikes is torn apart by prejudice, in a drama by Tony Vellela. Directed by Austin Pendleton. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 121 E. 24th St. 332-0027.)

Ashes to Ashes—It has taken three years for Harold Pinter's latest short play to cross the Atlantic, but the wait has been worth it. An eerie state of hauntedness is dramatized in the character of Rebecca (the masterly British actress Lindsay Duncan), a nervy middle-class woman who is thrilled and appalled by images of Nazi Germany—images so alive to her that she exists in an altered reality. The audience is thrown immediately into the middle of an intimate, disturbing conversation between Rebecca and her donnish partner, Devlin (invested with wry academic irony by David Strathairn), in which she attempts to explain the erotic charge of submitting to a former lover's tyrannical power. Having confessed to the thrill of it, however, she then goes on to impose her emptiness on Devlin, and the circuit of depersonalization seems complete. She has always carried the victim inside her; Pinter dares to show that she also carries the victimizer. Directed by Karel Reisz. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/22 & 3/1/99.) (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

Beautiful Thing—Jonathan Harvey's 1993 drama, set in London, about two working-class boys who fall in love. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

Benten Kozo—Traditional kabuki meets Jackie Chan in a delightful evening concocted by director Jim Simpson and his Bat Theatre Company. The work is based on Kawatake Mokuami's nineteenth-century play involving a princess, her missing fiancé, a master thief, and a priceless incense box; the company's hip updating of the script, along with Moe Schell's clever costumes, creates an ironic, funny, energetic production that (like many of the company's offerings in the past year) is well worth a trek to Tribeca. Angela Tweed, as the Chorus, is especially good. Runs in repertory with the company's revival of Mac Wellman's 1986 play "Cleveland." (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-0051.)

Bright Lights, Big City—A musical version of the Jay McInerney novel, with book, music, and lyrics by Paul Scott Goodman. Michael Greif

OLAF HAJEK

("Rent") is the director. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 780-9037.)

The Blue Room—Nicole Kidman is beautiful, leggy, and damn good at her job, and she and her excellent co-star, Iain Glen, have real chemistry, but it takes all of their charisma to give an iota of life to this show's cardboard characters and charmless script—an adaptation by David Hare of Arthur Schnitzler's Viennese sexual merry-go-round, "La Ronde." (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes March 7.)

Captains Courageous: The Musical—Frederick Freyer and Patrick Cook's musical version of Kipling's book—about a rich brat (Brandon Espinoza) who falls overboard from an ocean liner and is reformed by the poor fisherman (Treat Williams) who rescues him—suffers not from a lack of conviction but from a lack of conception. Most of it takes place on a crowded fishing boat, and despite a lot of vigorous rope pulling, invisible-fish chopping, and testosteroney chorale-style singing into the horizon, the smallest amount of dramatic movement is clearly a strain; it feels like cabin fever has set in and the crew is just trying to keep busy until shore leave, when they can get some real action. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

The Chemistry of Change—A gold-digger (Carlin Glynn) about to marry her tenth husband falls in love with a stranger (Larry Pine), in a dark comedy by Marlane Meyer. Lisa Peterson is the director. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200. Closes March 7.)

A Couple of Blaguards—Shay Duffin and Mickey Kelly perform Frank and Malachy McCourt's two-man autobiographical show. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Death of a Salesman—From Chicago's Goodman Theatre, a fiftieth-anniversary staging of Arthur Miller's play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Electra—David Leveaux's powerful production of Sophocles' tragedy, starring Zoë Wanamaker. The play's bewildering brutality comes through as clearly as yesterday's headlines. (12/28/98 & 1/4/99) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

Far East—An American military officer (Michael Hayden) is caught in a triangle involving his commander's wife, in a drama by A. R. Gurney, set during the Korean War. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Footloose—A musical adaptation of the 1984 film, co-written by Dean Pitchford (who also wrote the screenplay) and Walter Bobbie. With music by Tom Snow and lyrics by Mr. Pitchford. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Fosse—The choreographer Bob Fosse had an intimate understanding of the urban subculture, and of the erotic gyrations and tough bodily thrusts that give that culture a beat. Yet for all the devil-may-care attitude of a Fosse move (the jutting hip, the insouciant shrug), he was a master at adding an underlying sweetness to the not ordinarily sweet. All the Fosse standards, from "Mein Herr" to "Razzle Dazzle," are on display in this steamy revue, which, although it doesn't reveal anything new about the man behind the dances, reminds us why we won't be forgetting him any time soon. Created by Richard Maltby, Jr. (director), Ann Reinking (co-director/co-choreographer), and Chet Walker (choreography re-creator). (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Hothouse—An early Pinter comedy, in an Atlantic Theatre Company production, directed by Karen Kohlhaas. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

House/Lights—Gertrude Stein's libretto for the opera "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights" and the 1964 cult film "Olga's House of Shame" are the inspirations for the Wooster Group's latest work. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

James Naughton: Street of Dreams—Between covers of romantic tunes by artists ranging from Billy Strayhorn to the King, Naughton inserts funny, standup-style anecdotes from his thirty-year stage career, and whether in monologue or in song he's a charmer. He may not have Bing Crosby's command (he's a little too earnest when he croons "I'm Hip"), but his voice is smoothly charged, and so is his band, which is led by the superb John Oddo on piano. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Jodie's Body—A one-woman show by Aviva Jane Carlin, who portrays a plump artist's model living in London, whose ruminations, delivered in the nude, touch on the politics of beauty and the politics of her native South Africa. (ArcLight Theatre, 152 W. 71st St. 307-4100.)

Killer Joe—In Tracy Letts's graphically violent dark comedy, an American family striving for a better life—in this case, a bunch of losers living in a trailer outside Dallas—hires a hit man to help things along. The terrific production is so vividly unselfconscious that you hardly feel assaulted at all. Wilson Milam is the director. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

The Mineola Twins—In Paula Vogel's comedy, Swoosie Kurtz portrays both a good sister and her evil twin. Directed by Joe Mantello. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 719-9300.)

The Misanthrope—Martin Crimp's new version of Molière's comedy, starring Uma Thurman and Roger Rees, is set in present-day London. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 239-6200. Closes March 7.)

A Mom's Life—Kathryn Grody performs her 1990 one-woman comedy about child rearing. Sundays at 4 and 7, Mondays at 8, and Wednesdays at 2:30. (ArcLight Theatre, 152 W. 71st St. 307-4100.)

The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told—Paul Rudnick's new version of a very old tale, starring Alan Tudyk and Jay Goede as Adam and Steve and Becky Ann Baker and Kathryn Meisle as Jane and Mable. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

Murder in America—A drama about postmillennial chaos, by Allen Blumberg. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200. Closes March 7.)

The Mystery of Irma Vep—It's not difficult to imagine what made this farce a hit back in 1984: the play's author and original star, the immensely gifted Charles Ludlam, who died in 1987 of complications due to AIDS. But drag has been out of the closet for a long time now; this is a relic of a more innocent time. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Not About Nightingales—Tennessee Williams's recently rediscovered early play, inspired by a 1938 prison uprising, is directed by Trevor Nunn. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

Over the River and Through the Woods—In Joe DiPietro's new comedy, a young man planning his future clashes with his four Italian-American grandparents. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Paradise Hotel— A look into the nightmarish yet often hilarious workings of the human subconscious is almost always what you get with a Richard Foreman play (no complaints there), and in this case his concerns are particularly libidinal. A group of unfulfilled travellers searching for sexual nirvana end up finding nothing even remotely like it. Along the way, though, the audience gets the big idea even if the poor pilgrims don't: sex and romance are not on the same map, and believing otherwise makes for a perilous trip. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Rollin' on the T.O.B.A.—A musical about the final days of black vaudeville, starring Sandra Reaves-Phillips, Rudy Roberson, and Jeffery V. Thompson. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

Running Man—A familiar tale—the destruction of a family by racism and drug abuse—told with a grace and power that make it newly meaningful. Almost every word is sung, and Diedre Murray's jazz-inflected music is ruefully evocative. The performances, though, are the heart of the show. As the narrator and a conjure woman of sorts, Ronnell Bey sets the tone from the outset; her compelling presence convinces the audience that this is a tale worth hearing in all its particulars. For the most part the rest of the cast (especially Robert Jason Jackson, as the father) is equally good. Smoothly directed by Diane Paulus. Cornelius Eady wrote the book. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

Side Man—Warren Leight's astute, elegiac play, expertly directed by Michael Mayer, is a young man's bittersweet homage to his crazy, warring parents and to the mysteries of the jazz life that divided them. (11/23/98) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Snakebit—Actor turned playwright David Marshall Grant's drama about three friends in a state of flux has moved to a new theatre. Jace Alexander directed. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

This Is Our Youth—Kenneth Lonergan's highly praised comedy about postadolescent heartbreak. His characters are meant to be the by-products of a morally bankrupt culture; they have everything in life but a reason to be. Lonergan, whose script shows real theatrical promise, is good on surface behavior but not on subtext—everything that is psychologically important happens offstage. (Douglas Fairbanks, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Wit—In this first play by Margaret Edson, about the life and death (from ovarian cancer) of a John Donne scholar, Kathleen Chalfant gives an excruciating, powerful performance as Dr. Vivian Bearing, one of those larger-than-life professors who are terrifyingly smart, and proud of it. Dressed in a hospital gown and pushing an I.V. pole, Bearing plays games with words, which are giddily, awfully, hilarious (they are, in fact, the essence of wit); but word games will not save her, and she knows it. Right up to the last second, "Wit" has riches of acting, writing, and stagecraft that you revel in, even in the atmosphere of death, and it is directed with just the right touch by Derek Anson Jones. (1/18/99) (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown—Clark Gesner's 1967 musical based on the Charles Schulz comic strip, directed by Michael Mayer. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ART: Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. (Closes March 14.) . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SE-**

CRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW: Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE SOUND OF MUSIC:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE:** HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. . . . **TITANIC:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY—March 2 at 7:30: "Airs," "Sunset," and "Oh, You Kid." . . . ¶ March 3, March 6, and March 9 at 8 and March 7 at 3: "Cloven Kingdom," "Fiddlers Green," and "Piazzolla Caldera." . . . ¶ March 4 at 8 and March 6 at 2: "Roses," "The Word," and "Oh, You Kid." . . . ¶ March 5 at 8 and March 7 at 7:30: "A Field of Grass," "Profiles," "Nightshade," and "Offenbach Overtures." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through March 14.)

MARIA BENITEZ TEATRO FLAMENCO—The ten-member New Mexico-based company presents contemporary interpretations of traditional Spanish dance. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. March 2-5 at 8, March 6 at 2 and 8, and March 7 at 2.)

CARNIVAL—Dance Theatre Workshop's two-month-long series designed to give extended exposure to emerging companies. March 2-3 at 8: **KEELY GARFIELD** in "Minor Repairs Necessary." Through March 21. . . . ¶ March 4-5 at 8: **CYDNEY WILKES** in "Premonitions of Latitude (Plot)." Through March 14. . . . ¶ March 6 at 8 and March 7 at 3: **JEREMY NELSON & LUIS LARA** in "Morphylactic." (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. The festival continues through March 28.)

92ND STREET Y HARKNESS DANCE PROJECT—The Uptown dance series continues with "Slut for Art," a collaboration between choreographer Muna Tseng and avant-garde director Ping Chong. Projections of photographs by the choreographer's brother, the late Tseng Kwong Chi (his self-portrait series, which show him posing in front of tourist attractions in a Mao suit), provide the backdrops. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 415-5553. March 2-4 and March 6 at 8 and March 7 at 5.)

"FOOD FOR THOUGHT"—Guest curators Barbara Bryan, Gina Gibney, and Kim Berney each present a program of dance works. Bryan's slate includes Drew Pisarra's "Ladies' Voices" and Amy Cox's "Valaila Madness"; Gibney offers Marta Miller's "Devil in the Kitchen" and Martha Myers's "End-Game-a-Go-Go," among others; and Berney's choices include Yanira Castro's "Laugh to the Color Fishes" and Kristen Smiarowski's "Facing Madeleine." Dancegoers can halve the price of admission by bringing two cans of food for neighborhood charities. (Danspace Project, St Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 5-7 at 8:30.)

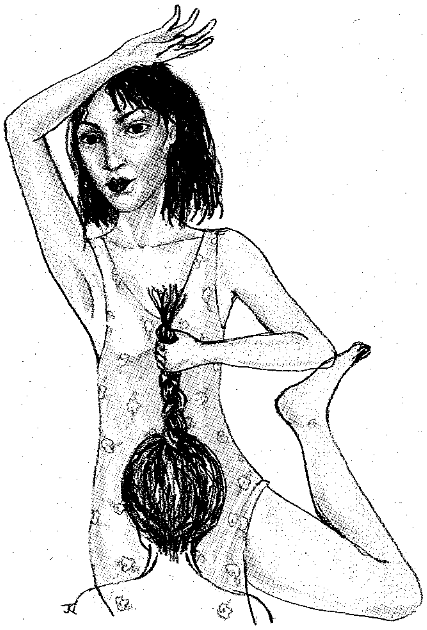
"THE HANGING MAN"—The Prague-based quartet of Halka Tresnakova, Kamil Bystricky, Petr Kruselnicky, and Ondrej Lipovsky, directed by Ctibor Turba, perform eleven acrobatic scenes—upside down for the most part, hanging by bare feet or roller skates, occasionally weighed down by stones. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. March 3-6 at 8:30.)

MARTHA@MOTHER—Richard Move, in the guise of Martha Graham, hosts the dance showcase, which in this installment features Arthur Aviles, Roseanne Chamecki and Andrea Lerner, Meredith Monk, and Robert La Fosse as Isadora Duncan. (875 Washington St. 924-0077. March 3 at 8 and 10 and March 4-5 at 8.)

"CAROUSEL"—The eight-member company Sensedance performs four works by the choreographer Henning Rübsam, including "Rhapsody," "Moonpaths," and the title work, set to a score of fairground music. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. March 4-7 at 8.)

"GYPSY FLAMENCO!"—The dozen performers in the Antonio el Pipa Company pay homage to the gypsies of Andalusia and to Tia Juana la del Pipa, the matriarch of the flamenco clan. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. March 5-6 at 8.)

QUETZALLI—The dancers and musicians of Ballet Folklorico de Veracruz present traditional dances from Mexico's Gulf Coast state. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. March 7 at 2.)



STORIES IN MOTION: *In rehearsals, the choreographer Keely Garfield, who appears in Dance Theatre Workshop's Carnival starting this week, gives articulate clues about what she wants in her memoir-like choreography. For instance, to create "Minor Repairs Necessary"—a work about "the subtle things that happen all day long that hurt"—she asked her dancers to imagine "careless collisions" of "intoxicated limbs" and "half-masked gestures that hang in the air." These evocative suggestions tend to result in silent works loaded with implied stories, as in the intimate, almost confessional duet "My Mother Was a Four-Alarm Fire" (pictured above). "I don't want to be on 'Oprah' or write a tell-all book," Garfield says. "It's through the dance that I get to these levels—the precarious highs and tumultuous lows that build until we just have to take a break. We're building toward quiet."*

ST. PETERSBURG BALLET—The company performs passages from such classical ballets as "Don Quixote," "Swan Lake," "Paquita," and "La Bayadère." (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. March 9 at 8.)

PILOBOLUS—The athletic Vermont sextet makes a midwinter visit to Queens. (Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadows–Corona Park. 718-760-0064. March 6 at 3 and 8 and March 7 at 3.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

KODO DRUMMERS—A fourteen-member troupe from Sado Island, in the Sea of Japan, that beats out primal rhythms on a variety of instruments, including a drum that weighs nine hundred pounds. (Beacon Theatre. March 2-3 at 8.)

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT—Boasting one of pop's most distinctive and unusual voices—he sings with the brashness of Ethel Merman and the raucous kick of Peter Allen—this twenty-five-year-old piano man's strongly emotive songs show a cinematic, lyrical grasp of unrequited love which can make you swoon. With Imogen Heap. (Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. 921-1940. March 3 at 8.)

"HARD KNOCK LIFE TOUR"—Two of rap's finest new practitioners—Jay-Z, the genius who turned a song from the musical "Annie" ("Hard Knock Life") into a bracing inner-city anthem, and Method Man, on leave from his high-profile post with the Wu-Tang Clan—team up with two other chart-topping artists, DMX and Redman, for an evening of marquee-quality hip-hop. (Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. March 3 at 8.)

"SALUTE TO KENNY BURRELL"—As the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of jazz guitar, Burrell has both rhapsodized with white-gloved elegance and dug deep into the blues since he came down from Detroit in the mid-fifties. Saluting this alternately polite and funky stylist are pianist Billy Taylor, saxophonist David (Fathead) Newman, trumpeter Jimmy Owens, and guitarists Russell Malone and Peter Bernstein. Burrell himself will also perform. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. March 4 at 8.)

ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND—The front end of an eighteen-evening stand with the boys from Macon, who, when they started out in 1969, already seemed like a troop of battle-scarred veterans. Before anyone unfurled the Southern-rock banner, they were juggling blues and jazz—two musical forms known for resilience. Despite the periodic feuding, splinter groups, and devastating deaths, these grizzled midnight riders are still soldiering on. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. March 4-6 and March 8-9, all at 8.)

CATARSIS AND HAVANA ENSEMBLE—The Cuban a-cappella ensemble and jazz band. (Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture, 450 Grand Concourse, at 149th St., the Bronx. 718-518-4455. March 6 at 7:30.)

ROD STEWART—He fills his shows with high-stepping selections from his gilded catalogue. On good nights, the voice is as tanned as a weathered football; on bad nights, the hair redeems what the larynx can't reach. (Continental Airlines Arena. March 6 at 8.)

BARRY MANILOW—Singing Sinatra favorites. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 8 at 7:30.)

JAZZ AT THE FLEA—March 8 at 8: Joel Forrester, the pianist ringleader of the delightful ensemble People Like Us, scales down and works with a trio here. If there's a style Forrester can't play, he's not letting on. . . . ¶ March 9 at 8: Clare Daly, the baritone saxophonist for People Like Us, is a prize player hidden in plain sight. The neglected big horn needs all the dedicated masters it can get, and in Daly it has a smart stylist who looks beyond Gerry Mulligan while savoring his lyrical legacy. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-0051.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 3: An evening of razor-sharp songwriting and lovely harmonizing, with **DAR WILLIAMS, LUCY KAPLANSKY,** and **RICHARD**

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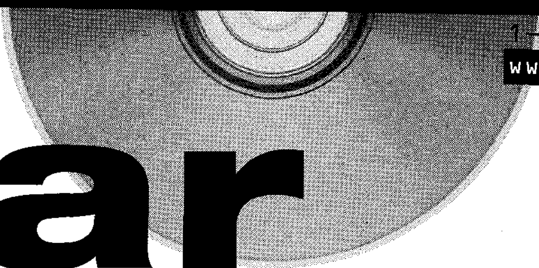

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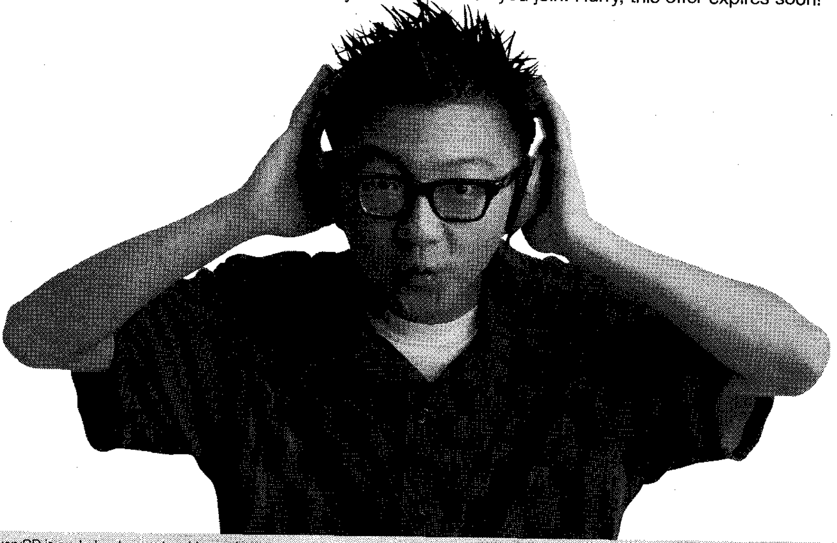

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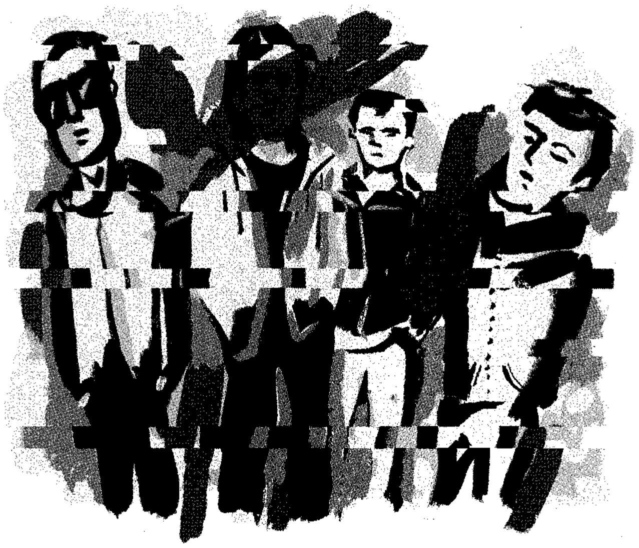
SHINDELL. March 6: The Band's bassist, **RICK DANKO.** March 7: The **MUDDY WATERS TRIBUTE BAND** makes blues the old-fashioned way, with pianist Pinetop Perkins, fretman Luther (Guitar Junior) Johnson, bassist Calvin (Fuzz) Jones, and drummer Willie (Big Eyes) Smith.

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—March 5-6: **CRACKER** has given up its erudite alternative honky-tonk to play something even stranger: FM-style classic rock. The band's most recent album, "Gentleman's Blues," suffered as a result, but onstage David Lowery's ferocious charisma and Johnny Hickman's fiery guitar still deliver a worthy Southern-boogie blowout. March 8: Label mates of Fatboy Slim, the London-based **LO FIDELITY ALLSTARS** turn out a variety of pulsing dance music known as Big Beat. But the rock-and-roll life hasn't been all party for these lads. Kim Deal and Warner Bros. are among those who have given them a hard time for their enthusiastic samplings. And in December their lead singer, Dave Randall (a.k.a. "Wrekked Train"), quit the band. But their latest album, "How to Operate with a Blown Mind," shows how conflict and adversity make for rich music. It's a complicated and highly rewarding mixture of funk, grooves, preaching, and, of course, driving beats.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Texas bluesman **GUITAR SHORTY** (March 5-6) cut his first singles in the late fifties, around the time Otis Rush and Buddy Guy were making their débuts. But recordings have never fully captured the excitement of his live act.

Coney Island High, 15 St. Marks Pl. (674-7959)—March 4: **SPOTTISWOODE & HIS ENEMIES.** Jonathan Spottiswoode, *the genius behind this* tight sextet, writes astringently morose ballads about love, and his deep, rough-hewn voice will make you think of Leonard Cohen.



The Lo Fidelity Allstars, at the Bowery Ballroom.

RUSSELL CHRISTIAN

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. March 6: Singer-songwriter **MARTHA WAINWRIGHT.** The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 5: **SHAWN MULLINS,** a soft, VH1-sanctioned version of Beck. March 10: The kings of rap, **RUN-DMC.** . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 5: **JOI.** *Led by two brothers from* Bengal, Farook and Haroon Shamsher, this London-based d.j collective has been a fixture of the U.K. dance scene since the early nineties. When they perform in a concert setting, they add sitar, tablas, and vocals to their hypnotic mixture of break beats and traditional Asian rhythms.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—March 5: The **HILLBILLY FUNK ALL-STARS** has the former Little Feat rhythm section of bassist Kenny Gradney and drummer Richie Hayward, along with fiddle legend Vassar Clements, keyboardist T. Lavitz, and vocalist Catfish Hodge. **C. J. CHENIER** (March 7), son of the legendary zydeco accordionist Clifton Chenier, upholds the traditions of that Creole dance music. Chenier the younger straps on his father's old fifty-pound piano-key accordion and leads his Red Hot Louisiana Band through a repertory of waltzes, two-steps, and joist-shaking rhythms guaranteed to make dancers kick off their shoes and do the old man proud. If this sounds intimidating, don't fuss; dance lessons are provided before the show.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—A guitarist's guitarist, **JACK WILKINS** (March 3) is a New York secret worth blabbing about. Jazz guitar brings out the sprinter in too many players; Wilkins thankfully takes the long way home much of the time. March 4-6: The R. & B.-coated jazz of the Hammond organ-and-saxophone combo has become a wholly American dialect, and few artists speak it as eloquently as keyboardist **JIMMY MC GRIFF** and saxophonist **HANK CRAWFORD.** March 2 and March 9: Charles Mingus, like that other American bard, Walt Whitman, *contained multitudes. The newly formed* **MINGUS ORCHESTRA** (in on Tuesdays in March) now augments the well-entrenched Mingus Big Band (Thursdays at Fez), and concentrates on the late bassist-composer's more formal works. Gil Goldstein will conduct and contribute new arrangements. The Big Band is celebrating its sixth anniversary; this is a chance to see the birth of what may become an institution. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Latin rhythms have been part of the foundation of jazz since its turn-of-the-century beginnings, so it's really no surprise that modernists from Dizzy Gillespie to saxophonist **CHICO FREEMAN** (through March 7) have been drawn to its more explicitly tropical elements. Freeman's Latin-jazz unit, Guataca, is stocked with old hands of this time-honored fusion, including pianist Hilton Ruiz, conga player Carlos (Potato) Valdez, and flutist Dave Valentin. *Dining.*

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 7: The **DONALD HARRISON** quartet. Harrison's days as a straitlaced neoconservative are long over. The New Orleans-born saxophonist is now happy mixing and matching the music he grew up with: black-Indian chants, Meters-styled funk, and, yes, jazz. In Harrison's case, finding truth in his roots has set him free. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—The return of saxophonist **GARY BARTZ** (March 3-7) is a feel-good tale for the nineties: a comer from the glory days of the late sixties returns, his powers intact, with a solid commitment to pure swing. On an inspired night, when he feels like parading his harmonic knowledge and his dive-bomber drive, Bartz can be staggering.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Does artist **LARRY RIVERS** (March 3-6) play saxophone as well as Ornette Coleman paints? There's only one way to find out.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 5: **LEROY JENKINS,** the man who brought the violin into avant-garde jazz, always has something up his sleeve. He's been surprising and confounding for three decades now and has yet to show signs of letting up.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—The Panamanian bassist **SANTI DIBRIANO** (through March 6) may have the fierce young jazz saxophonist **ABRAHAM BURTON** in his new band, Circle Chant, but the presence of hard-core Latin players and the addition of violin and hand percussion speak of roots music. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 7: The **TOM HARRELL** quintet. Much like his sometime partner Joe Lovano, trumpet and flugelhorn player Harrell loves to mix it up every chance he gets. Judging from its personnel, his latest ensemble is ripe with promise: drummer **LEON PARKER,** pianist **XAVIER DAVIS,** and guitarist **FREDDIE BRYANT** join the ingenious horn player. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Anselm Kiefer: Works on Paper 1969-1993" presents fifty-four drawings, watercolors, gouaches, and woodcuts ac*quired by the museum in 1995. Through* March 21. . . . ¶ "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara." Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Cubism and Fashion," at the Costume Institute. Through March 14. . . . ¶ "Eighteenth-Century French Drawings in New York Collections" is a *fête galante* of an exhibition, with large, finished works by most of the period's major figures and fine works by the lesser known. Watteau is represented by six chalk drawings, including a sheet of four vivid studies of a woman's head beneath a chic little hat. Boucher's gouache of a fortune-teller and his carefully finished oil sketch of the Adoration of the Shepherds are more subdued in color and almost more appealing than his big canvases, which can sometimes seem too confectionary. Many of the genre scenes sparkle with charm, as in Jean-Baptiste Mallet's painting of a shoe salesman displaying a cunning blue slipper to a mother and daughter in their boudoir. Through April 25. . . . ¶ "Picasso: Painter and Sculptor in Clay." Through June 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Julia Margaret Cameron's Women," an exhibition of fifty-seven prints by the early photographer (1815-1879), whose idealized portraits of Victorian women (in*cluding Julia Jackson, the mother of Virginia* Woolf, and Alice Liddell, the model for Lewis Carroll's Alice) often presented them as nymphs or goddesses. Through May 4. . . . ¶ "Sight Gags: Grotesque, Caricature, and Wit in Modern and Contemporary Drawing." Through May 4. . . . ¶ An installation of twenty-five samplers by Elaine Reichek, whose embroidered sayings have been culled from Virginia Woolf, Ad Reinhardt, Mary Queen of Scots, and other sources. Through March 30. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 6; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—For anyone who remembers the forty-year residency of "Guernica" at the Museum of Modern Art, Picasso's work from the Second World War period is anything but obscure. But however often one may have seen the works in "Picasso and the War Years: 1937-45," the exhibition still carries the force of revelation. In particular, Picasso's series of seated women seems to strike every note on the emotional scale, from sinister to jolly, hateful to lustful, and he painted in styles that range from a revival of his earlier, elegant neoclassical style to savage analytic Cubism that makes one lady look like a baboon. Through May 9. . . . ¶ "Jim Dine: Walking Memory, 1959-69." Through May 16. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Ray Johnson (1927-1995) was famous for being New York's most famous unfamous artist. He deliberately cultivated his role as an outsider, although he practically invented the "happening" and correspondence art, among other things. His retrospective is a gas, more like a raid on the closet of a highly imaginative pack rat than an art exhibit. His art was verbal, allusive, and whimsical: a pair of saddle oxfords (the right one painted with the word "John" and the left "Cage") is entitled "A Shoe." Among other treasures is a life mask of Candy Darling, which Johnson used to carry around the Village in a see-through bag—a one-man, walking mini-"happening." Through March 21. . . . ¶ An exhibition of fifty-two Brice Marden drawings. Through March 28. . . . ¶ "Pale Guide to Transparent Things," an exhibition of photographs by Seton Smith. Through April 4. . . . ¶ "Circular Breathing," a video installation by Gary Hill. Through March 21. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Domestic Transformations: Working in Brooklyn" features paintings and sculptures by borough residents Ann Agee, Ron Baron, Jean Blackburn, and Andy Yoder. Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays, 11 to 9; and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. (517-2742)—The Japanese have never fretted about distinctions between art and craft. "Bamboo Masterworks," an exhibit of a hundred baskets from the collection of Lloyd Cotsen, demonstrates the expressive capacity of even this limited medium. A spherical flower container by the early-twentieth-century master Suzuki Kyokushosai takes the form of an exquisite Japanese lantern with openwork plaiting. Contemporary works are more often flights of sculptural fancy: Maeda Chikubosai's flower basket, from 1956, is a Möbius strip in bamboo, whose patterns intertwine in a harmonious fugue. The society's installation is superb; there are even a few baskets out in the open which the visitor can touch. Through May 30. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Dahesh Museum, 601 Fifth Ave., at 49th St. (759-0606)—"A Victorian Salon: Paintings from the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth, England" offers thirty-five examples of nineteenth-century British painting (allegories, pastoral landscapes, ringleted goddesses) originally displayed at the Royal Bath Hotel, a sort of seaside Bellagio in the latter days of the Empire. Through April 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Elizabeth Murray—New paintings in the artist's jubilant style, halfway between Matisse and Dr. Seuss. Murray's works have grown less sculptural and more legible lately, but they remain attractively calamitous. Most of the shaped canvases and reliefs here feature coffee cups tumbling off splayed tabletops or shattering and spilling out toward the viewer. From such minor mishaps Murray makes grand exhilaration. Through March 13. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

Richard Stankiewicz (1922-83)—Three important sculptures and a large group of ink drawings, from the early sixties. Stankiewicz made the drawings by pouring and dripping ink onto Japanese tissue, occasionally helping it along with a brush. The monumental images that resulted are at once vigorous and elegantly understated—among the first American works to merit the now all-too-common accolade "Zen-like." The sculptures, on the other hand, are witty junk-metal assemblages that promiscuously blend the graceful and the ugly. Stankiewicz was never as well-known as Jean Tinguely, but these pieces predate the Frenchman's best assemblages by several years. Through March 13. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.)

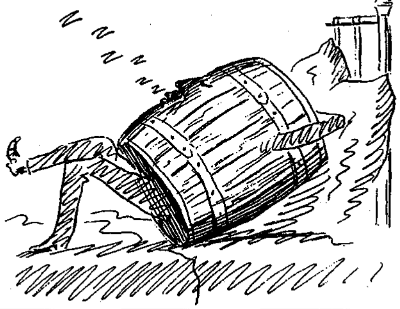
Tom Wesselmann—"Small Survey, Small Scale, 1960-98" includes drawings and maquettes for the artist's installations from the sixties and seventies, which combined real objects—a breast (its owner otherwise curtained), a perfume bottle, an orange—with flat paintings of female nudes. The objects on view here are only dollhouse-size; three-inch-tall Guinness bottles and a tiny, clumsily painted radio have a poignant charm that's missing in the finished installations. In miniature, the artist's celebrated eroticism is not quite so overbearing. There's even a drawing without a nipple, called "Little Landscape," of a Volkswagen Beetle flying through a mountain wilderness. Through March 20. (Davidson, 41 E. 57th St. 799-7555.)

Harold Weston (1894-1972)—A small retrospective, the first in twenty years, of this early American modernist, who was also a guiding force behind the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts. The exhibition includes never before exhibited Persian sketches, made when he was in the Army during the First World War, as well as oils painted during a subsequent sojourn in France. But the highlight is a sampling of Adirondack landscapes, mostly painted while Weston and his wife were living in a remote cabin. Through March 31. (Wigmore Fine Art, 22 E. 76th St. 794-2128.)

"Figure and Fantasy"—An impressive group of French landscapes, portraits, and genre paintings from 1650 to 1800. Fragonard and Boucher are represented by major paintings, the former by an allegorical portrait of an actress posing as Venus, the latter by a ten-foot-tall canvas called "The Fisherman and the Bird Catcher." But the masterpiece here is the magnificent "Penitent Magdalene," by Georges de la Tour, a haunting image of the figure contemplating a skull by candlelight, her face obscured by a mass of falling hair. There is much of interest even among the second-rate work, such as "The First Love Letter," a sugary mother-and-daughter genre scene by Marguerite Gérard. It's little more than competent, but it's fascinating to see a painting by a woman artist which was exhibited at the Salon of 1814. Through March 6. (Berry-Hill, 11 E. 70th St. 744-2300.)

Short List—**ERIC BLUM** and **JEREMY KIDD,** Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323. Both shows through March 6. . . . **ANITA HUFFINGTON,** O'Hara, 41 E. 57th St. 355-3330. Through March 13. . . . **LEE KRASNER,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through March 6. . . . **GIOVANNI BATTISTA PIRANESI,** Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7288. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 5; through March 20. . . . **AD REINHARDT** and **ROBERT MOTHERWELL,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4900. Both shows through March 13. . . . **ANN SPERRY,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 307-5730. Through March 13. . . . **NIKOLAI EFIMOVICH TIMKOV,** Spanierman, 45 E. 58th St. 832-0208. Through April 3. . . . **DAVID WOJNAROWICZ,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through March 6.

IT SLEEPS ALONE



A FRUGAL AND ANONYMOUS SCOT, LONG YEARS AGO, observed that the oaken casks which had been used for bringing sherry, port, or madeira into the country, might be employed thereafter to mature malt whisky.

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GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Rei Kawakubo—Fashion designers, it is fashionable to say, are the art stars of the nineties and Kawakubo, who has dressed Merce Cunningham's dancers in stretch fabric versions of her humpback couture, is perhaps the artsiest. Her new Comme des Garçons boutique, next to Matthew Marks and down the block from Dia, is as much an installation as a store; its sculpted lacquer displays, in black and white, cleverly convert the labyrinthine dizziness of Serra's "Torqued Ellipses" to commercial purposes. And could it be coincidence that the brushed-aluminum cylinder that serves as an entryway was, like Serra's monuments, constructed with the help of shipbuilders? Whatever you think of the peekaboo displays of sweaters and gowns, this timely homage is worth a visit. (520 W. 22nd St. 604-9200.)

Nina Levy—Seductively playful photographs by a sculptor who casts and enlarges her own body parts and then poses with them. Shot against a velvety black background, the resulting images are quite formal but also enchantingly silly. They represent the sort of narcissistic calisthenics that we do in our heads, as we inventory and assess our physical selves. Sometimes Levy wears a massively enlarged version of her own head, its features locked in an uncomfortable social grin. In other pictures she sports an alien back, or foot, or tongue. The exhibit also includes a sculptural assemblage, "Couple," in which Levy turns her dry wit to more sentimental purposes. Through March 6. (I-20 Gallery, 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100.)

Group Show—The best of several recent ambitious drawing roundups in Chelsea is this small show, featuring a triumvirate of cartoon artists which spans three generations. The youngest of the three is Barry McGee, a San Francisco-based artist who sometimes goes by the graffiti tag Twist. He fills a wall with framed variations of his trademark image: a spudhead with slicked-back hair and a dazed expression, eyes rolled back as though he were fainting from lack of oxygen. It's easy to guess why he might, given that his neighbors here are R. Crumb and Philip Guston, who manipulate a similar set of cartoon conventions with far greater versatility. But their proximity is encouraging rather than annihilating, as if they were nudging McGee cheerfully back to the drawing board. Through March 6. (Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752.)

Short List—**christian alexa,** Martz, 529 W. 20th St. 206-3686. Through March 13. . . . **donald baechler,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through March 27. . . . **jean-marc bustamante,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through March 20. . . . **bart domburg,** Gasser & Grunert, 524 W. 19th St. 807-9494. Through March 20. . . . **zaha hadid,** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through April 3. . . . **karen kilimnik,** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through March 20. . . . **kathleen kucka,** Coploff, 526 W. 26th St. 741-1149. Through April 3. . . . **jerry moriarty,** Visual Arts Museum, 209 W. 23rd St. 592-2181. Through April 1. . . . **marc mulders,** Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600. Through March 20. . . . **antonio petracca,** Foster, 529 W. 20th St. 966-9024. Through March 20. . . . **jim shaw,** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through March 27. . . . **claude simard,** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701. Through March 13. . . . **sonita singwi,** Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225. Through April 3. . . . **paul thek,** Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474. Through March 13.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Malcolm Morley—Paintings by an eccentric English artist who owns a vast collection of model ships and planes. Sometimes Morley paints a single airplane from several angles, like a child admiring a Christmas present. Elsewhere—like the same child six months later—he crashes a dozen different models together (Viking ships, tankers, Sopwith Camels), creating a monster pileup of uncertain pictorial significance. Morley's early work is said to have launched both Photo-Realism and neo-expressionism. These works don't suggest an ism as much as they do a soundtrack to a disaster movie. Through March 20. (Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685.)

Raymond Pettibon—A midcareer retrospective, featuring more than two hundred of the Los Angeles-based artist's cartoony ink drawings. Pettibon's favorite tactic pits highbrow text against lowbrow pictures. Passages based on Henry James or John Ruskin are paired with freehand reference to pop culture—Gumby, say, or Joan Crawford. The results are funny, erudite, and macabre, like the thoughts of a deranged academic watching late-night TV. Through April 10. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166.)

"Paradise 8"—The standout of this anarchic group show is "Cyclorama," a serenely beautiful video installation in a small circular room. Using footage shot in revolving restaurants in eight cities, Marco Brambilla has created an apparently continuous panorama of morning light. The effect is absorbing and delicate enough to restore one's faith in the medium (video, that is—not revolving restaurants). Except for Dan Devine's inside-out Volkswagen, most of the other installations here suggest hobbyism. Through April 10. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway. 966-7745.)

Short List—**barbara bloom,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through April 24. . . . **roy dowell,** Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200. Through March 13. . . . **linda francis,** Davies, 23 Commerce St. 243-6840. Through April 3. . . . **tim hawkinson,** Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599. Through April 30. . . . **rachel khedoori,** Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through March 17. . . . **jill levine,** P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Through March 13. . . . **ma liuming,** Tilton, 49 Greene St. 941-1775. Through March 20. . . . **sergio vega,** Basilico Fine Arts, 26 Wooster St. 966-1831. Through March 20. . . . **stephen westfall,** Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012. Through March 27.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Animation art. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000. March 6.)

Phillips—An auction of stamps and covers includes one of two known examples of the rarest Mexican stamp ever issued, a ten-centavo commemorative from 1921 called "The Embrace of Acatempan," with its inset image inverted. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. March 8.)

Doyle—Jewelry, watches, silver, and coins. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. March 3-4.)

Swann—On March 4-5, an auction of prints, drawings, and *livres d'artiste;* also on March 4, a sale of books about art and architecture. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

Morell—An auction of fine wines. (Grand Havana Room, 666 Fifth Ave., at 54th St. March 6. For information, call 307-4200.)

Works on Paper—A must for collectors of prints, watercolors, and the like, this year attracting ninety top international dealers. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. March 3-7. For information, call 777-5218.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

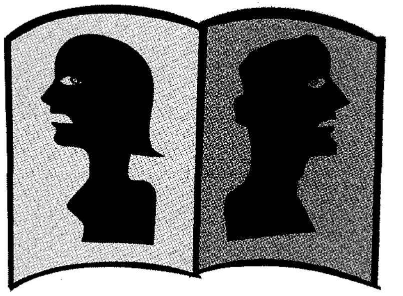
Stephane Couturier / "Visage"—Large-scale Cibachrome prints of construction sites in Paris, Dresden, and Berlin. / Fifteen vintage portraits by, among others, Julia Margaret Cameron, Walker Evans, and Berenice Abbott. Both shows through March 27. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

"America and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968"—A group show of well-known and obscure photographs, including images by Ben Fernandez, Bruce Davidson, Eve Arnold, and Danny Lyon. Through March 19. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St.

BOOK CURRENTS

Splitsville

When Socrates was asked by a young man, "Should I marry or not?," the philosopher answered, "Whichever you do, you will repent it." This sunny idea—that both commitment and freedom can lead to despair—is the subject of a number of new books. John Taylor's **Falling** (Random House), an account of the disintegration of the author's eleven-year marriage, chronicles the rigors of divorce—afternoons spent in a mediator's office, nights spent sleeping on the couch—as well as the tortured second-guessing that can accompany such a big decision. "We had to help each other bring it to an end," Taylor writes. "I saw all this with piercing clarity, and then I thought, But if we are capable of such a delicate and complicated collaboration, maybe we should stay together after all."



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

In **Apples & Oranges** (Houghton Mifflin), Jan Clausen explains how, after a twelve-year relationship with a woman she was raising a daughter with, she fell in love with a man. Although splitting from her partner also meant splitting from a tightly knit gay community, Clausen welcomed the change: "My therapist asked me how I imagined it would feel to be with him. 'As if I were by myself, only someone would be there,' I answered instantly, intensely longing for it."

Readers hoping for a testament to hard-won marital permanence can look forward to **Cleaving: The Story of a Marriage,** coming in May from North Point Press. Dennis and Vicki Covington take turns describing how—despite infidelities, infertility, and early bouts of alcoholism—they've managed to stay together. It's a challenge that the subjects of Melissa Roth's **On the Loose: Big-City Days and Nights of Three Single Women** (William Morrow) aren't quite ready for. Occupied with bachelor-girl life styles, they contemplate marriage from a distance, at once repelled and attracted by the idea. As Jen, a twenty-nine-year-old movie developer, explains, "The average life span of a marriage in L.A. is about eighteen months. . . . You should only marry someone you can imagine being happily divorced from."

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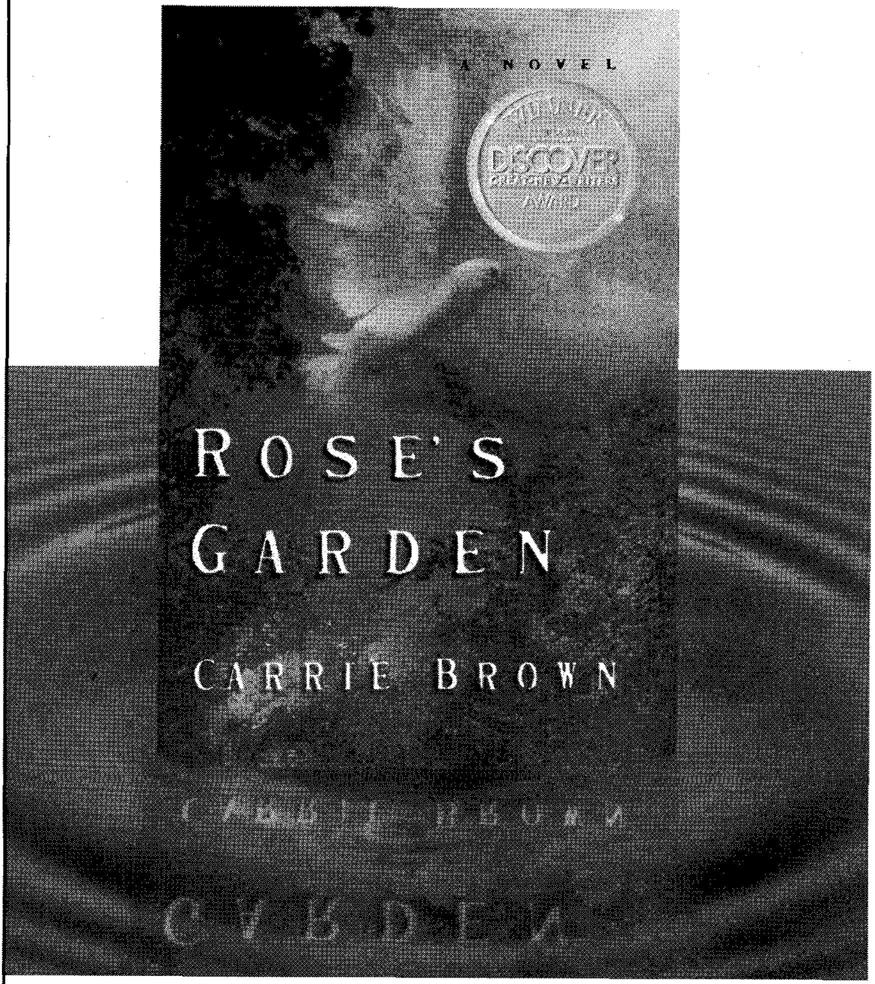

ROSE'S GARDEN

by Carrie Brown

A celebration of a love that transcends age, time and death, Carrie Brown's remarkable debut novel has earned her the Barnes & Noble *Discover Great New Writers Award* for 1998, as conferred by our distinguished judges, Sandra Benitez, Katharine Weber and Oscar Hijuelos. It is the story of Conrad, seventy-five years old and four months a widower, whose loss of his wife Rose leaves him bereft of companionship and hope until he is graced by an angelic visitation—in *Rose's Garden*. The lesson Conrad learns is one that will touch your heart and stir your intellect. (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill)

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"Inside/Outside"—Works from *Blind Spot* magazine's latest issue, by, among others, Jeff Brouws, Lia Nalbantidou, Richard Misrach, Tokihiro Sato, and John Waters. Through March 27. (Mann, at its new location, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600.)

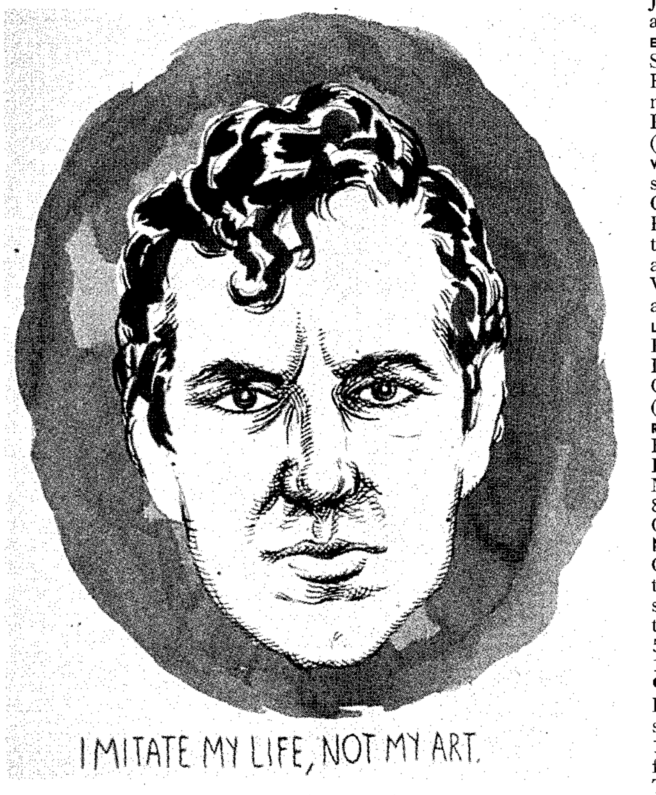
"The Photogram: 1918-1948"—This survey of works made with the cameraless technique includes examples by Christian Schad, Man Ray, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and El Lissitzky. Through March 6. (Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.)

International Center of Photography—"Bruce Davidson: The Brooklyn Gang, 1959." Through March 7. . . . ¶ "Intimate City: The Photographs of Thomas Roma." Through March 7. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

International Center of Photography Midtown—"To the Rescue: Eight Artists in an Archive." Through May 16. (Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**BERND AND HILLA BECHER,** 420 West Broadway. 966-6160. Through March 27. . . . **KEITH CARTER,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through March 13. . . . **KEITH COTTINGHAM,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through April 3. . . . **JED DEVINE,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through March 27. . . . **PETER FISCHLI AND DAVID WEISS,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200. Through March 20. . . . **LEE FRIEDLANDER,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through March 20. . . . **BARBARA KASTEN,** Weber, 529 W. 20th St. 691-5711. Through March 13. . . . **SY KATTELSON,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through March 13. . . . **EDWARD KEATING,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through April 3. . . . **LON OF NEW YORK,** Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays; through March 28. . . . **WENDELL MAC RAE,** Witkin, 415 West Broadway. 925-5510. Through April 10. . . . **BARBARA MORGAN** and **BRETT WESTON,** Danziger, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 734-5300. Open Sundays, noon to 5; both shows through March 27. . . . **LISA PINES,** Debs, 529 W. 20th St. 647-7080. Through March 6. . . . **LILIANA PORTER,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through March 18. . . . **AARON ROSE,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through March 20. . . . **VICTOR SCHRAGER,** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through March 6. . . . **MALICK SIDIBÉ,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through March 6. . . . **DAN TOROP,** Boesky, 51 Greene St. 941-9888. Through March 27. . . . **ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF,** Kaplan, 48 Greene St. 226-6131. Through April 3. . . . **FREDERIC WEBER** and **AUGUST SANDER,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Through March 27. . . . **THOMAS WREDE,** Cristinerose, 529 W. 20th St. 206-0297. Through April 3. . . . **FRANK YAMRUS,** Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through March 6.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.)


I MITATE MY LIFE, NOT MY ART.

Self-portrait by Raymond Pettibon (The Drawing Center).

COURTESY REGEN PROJECTS

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall is 247-7800, and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**IL TROVATORE,** with Michele Crider, Elena Zaremba, Richard Margison, and Alexandru Agache; conducted by Jun Märkl. (March 3 at 8 and March 6 at 1:30.) . . . **ELEKTRA,** with Gabriele Schnaut, Deborah Voigt, Hanna Schwarz, Kenneth Riegel, and Monte Pederson; Franz Vote. (March 4 at 8.) . . . **KHOVANSHCHINA,** by Mussorgsky, with Dolora Zajick, Clifton Forbis, Vladimir Bogachov, Nikolai Putilin, Paata Burchuladze, and Roberto Scandiuzzi; Valery Gergiev. (March 5 and March 9 at 7:30.) . . . **LA BOHÈME,** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Ainhoa Arteta, Luis Lima, and Gino Quilico; Marco Armiliato. (March 6 at 7:30.) . . . **RIGOLETTO,** with Andrea Rost, Ramón Vargas, and Franz Grundheber; Maurizio Benini. (March 8 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

New York City Opera—Opening performances of the company's spring season, which continues through April 25. March 5 at 8 and March 6 at 1:30: "La Bohème." . . . ¶ March 6 at 8: "Lizzie Borden," by Jack Beeson. . . . ¶ March 7 at 1:30: "Madama Butterfly." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

Opera Orchestra of New York—Presenting a concert version of Verdi's "I Masnadieri," with soprano Sally Wolf, tenor Antonio Nagore, baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and bass Paul Plishka. Eve Queler conducts. (Carnegie Hall. March 7 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall. March 4 at 7:30, March 5 at 2, and March 6 at 8: Ivan Fischer conducts Beethoven's "Coriolan" Overture and his scena "Ah, Perfido!," in addition to Mahler's Symphony No. 5; soprano Amanda Roocroft is the soloist in the scena and the symphony. . . . ¶ March 9 at 8: The same program, with Gisèle Ben-Dor conducting. (875-5030.)

Orchestra of St. Luke's—The St. Luke's season-long Haydn Festival continues with chamber and orchestral concerts. March 3 at 8: Haydn's Symphonies No. 24 and No. 26 (the "Lamentatione"), his C-Major Cello Concerto (with Myron Lutzke), and a Double-Bass Concerto by his friend Domenico Dragonetti (featuring John Feeney), all performed by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, in a grouping that approximates the size of Haydn's orchestra at the Esterházy court. (Weill Recital Hall.) . . . ¶ March 4 at 8: Roger Norrington conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's in two works from late in Haydn's career: his Symphony No. 103 (the "Drumroll") and the "Harmoniemesse" (from 1802, making it the last major work that he completed). Soprano Dominique Labelle, mezzo-soprano Annette Markert, tenor Richard Clement, baritone Sanford Sylvan, and the New York Concert Singers perform in the Mass. (Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ March 7 at 2: The St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble reprises its March 3 program. (Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway. For information about tickets to this concert, call 212-596-6100, ext. 114.) . . . **NOTE:** On March 6, from 10 A.M. until 5:30, the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Morgan Library host a symposium (with performances) about Haydn, his music, and issues of interpretation. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. For information, call 596-6100, ext. 111.)

Eos Orchestra—Soprano Wendy Hill is featured in the première of David Del Tredici's "Dracula" and soprano Ilana Davidson is spotlighted in Ligeti's "Mysteries of the Macabre," in a concert that also includes four short orchestral pieces by Ives and several works by Spike Jones. Jonathan Sheffer conducts. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. March 4 at 8. For information about tickets, call 691-6415.)

Sonidos de las Américas—This year's festival focusses on various styles of Cuban music. March 5 at 7:30: A cabaret evening of dance-inspired music by Ernesto Lecuona, Manuel Saumell, and Ignacio Cervantes. (Joe's Pub at the Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. For information, call 539-8777.) . . . ¶ March 6 at 7:30: A joint recital by Catarsis (practitioners of the improvisatory vocal style known as *bembe*) and the Havana Ensemble (a jazz group). (Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture, 450 Grand Concourse, at 149th St., the Bronx. 718-518-4455.) . . . ¶ March 8 at 8: Orlando Ríos y Nueva Generación, in an evening that combines traditional Cuban drumming with avant-garde electronics. (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 219-3055.) . . . ¶ March 9 at 8: Chamber music for woodwinds, by Harold Gramatges Leyte-Vidal, Guido López-Gavillán, Paquito D'Rivera, and José Raúl Bernardo, played by the Quintet of the Americas. (Americas Society, Park Ave. at 68th St. Tickets at the door.) (For general information on the festival, which continues through March 14, call 977-8495.)

Paula Robison and Friends—The flutist shares the spotlight with fortepianist Kenneth Cooper in this concert of sonatas and concertos by Mozart. (Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 5-6 at 7.)

Canticum Novum Singers—Harold Rosenbaum directs a mostly Italian program, including pieces by Monteverdi, Gesualdo, Verdi, and Dallapiccola. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. March 6 at 8. For information about tickets, call 914-763-3453.)

New York Youth Symphony—Mischa Santora conducts Brahms's "Tragic" Overture, Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Vitalij Kuprij), Falla's Suite No. 2 from "The Three-Cornered Hat," and the première of Kevin Putz's "Concerto for Everyone." (Carnegie Hall. March 7 at 2.)

Curtis Institute of Music Chamber Orchestra—Leon Fleisher conducts Haydn's Symphony No. 49, Mozart's Symphony No. 29, Hindemith's "Kammermusik No. 1," and Grazyna Bacewicz's Concerto for String Orchestra.

(Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. March 7 at 2. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

Musica Viva—Jean-Louis Petit leads the chorus and orchestra in his own oratorio "Traces" and Honegger's "King David." (All Souls Unitarian Church, Lexington Ave. at 80th St. 794-3646. March 7 at 7.)

Jupiter Symphony—Jens Nygaard leads works by composers whose renown has faded a touch: Kéler-Béla (the nom de plume of Albert von Keler, a mid-nineteenth-century Hungarian violinist and bandmaster), Benjamin Godard (his Violin Concerto No. 2, with Kyung Sun Lee), Amy Beach, and Xaver Scharwenka (his Piano Concerto No. 2, with William Noll). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. March 8 at 2 and 7 and March 9 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

Oratorio Society of New York—Lyndon Woodside directs the choir and the Westchester Philharmonic Orchestra in Haydn's "The Creation," with soloists Yunah Lee (soprano), Steven Tharp (tenor), and Kyle Ketelson (bass). (Carnegie Hall. March 9 at 8.)

RECITALS

Leif Ove Andsnes—The Norwegian pianist performs Liszt's Ballade No. 2, "Andante Lagrimosa" (from the "Harmonies Poétiques et Réligieuses"), and "Après une Lecture du Dante" (from the Second Year of "Années de Pèlerinage"), in addition to Nielsen's Chaconne (Op. 32) and Schumann's Sonata No. 1. (Carnegie Hall. March 3 at 7:30.)

Tokyo String Quartet—The ensemble plays quartets by Haydn (in E-Flat Major, Op. 64, No. 6), Webern (the "Langsamer Satz"), and Wolf (the "Italienische Serenade"), and Jon Kimura Parker assists in Schumann's Piano Quintet. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 3 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Toby Hoffman plays Joel Hoffman's "Krakow Variations (1999)" for unaccompanied viola, pianist Paige Roberts performs Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations, and the two join for Bach's G-Major Sonata (BWV 1027). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. March 4 at 7:30 and March 7 at 4.)

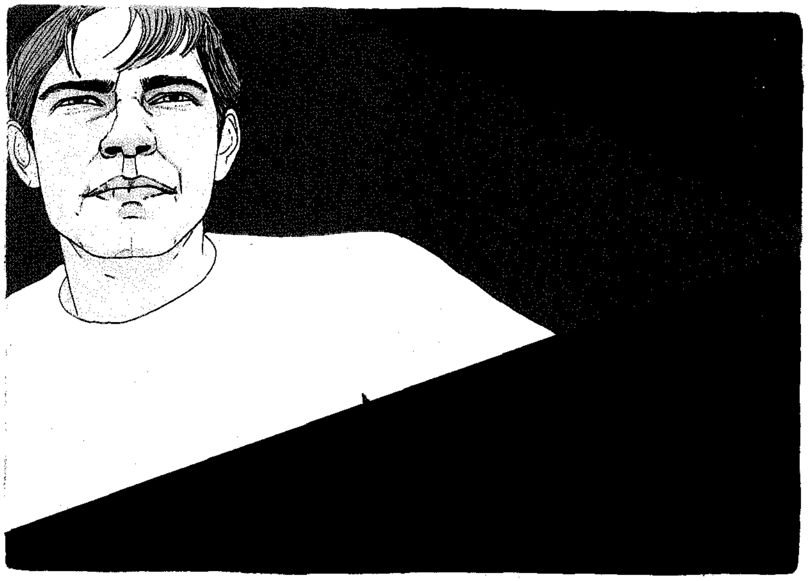
Elizabeth Futral and Håkan Hagegård—The soprano and the baritone join for a recital that includes Wolf's "Brentano Lieder" and Frank Martin's "Six Monologues from Hoffmansthal's 'Jedermann.'" Pianist Elisabeth Boström assists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 4 at 8.)

Leipzig String Quartet—Performing quartets by Mozart (in G Major, K. 387), Mendelssohn (in E Minor, Op. 44, No. 2), and Schubert (the "Death and the Maiden"). (Weill Recital Hall. March 5 at 8.)

Matt Sullivan—The oboist, a mainstay of the avant-garde scene, doubles (or triples) on English horn and "digital horn" in this recital, which ranges from works by Schumann and Hindemith to recent pieces by Christopher Berg, C. Bryan Rulon (two arrangements of Telemann fantasies), and Claudio Spies. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. March 6 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Peter Schickele and Friends—Songs, instrumental music, and poetry readings, with tenor Dale Düsing, poet Susan Sindall, and the Calliope Renaissance band. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 6 at 8.)

Alexander String Quartet—Every string quartet has to grapple with Beethoven sooner or later; this foursome, founded fifteen years ago, has programmed a good deal of his music from the outset. For the past dozen of those years, the group has served as ensemble-in-residence at Baruch College, where it has two stints each year. There the quartet's members not only teach students of music and the liberal arts but also share their perspectives on such concerns as coöperative decision-making and organizational finances with students pursuing business careers. Over the course of six concerts on two weekends, at Merkin Concert Hall, the ensemble will perform all sixteen of Beethoven's string quartets (all of which they recently recorded for the Arte Nova label). March 7 at 11:25 A.M.: The Quartets No. 1 and No. 15. . . . ¶ At 3: The Quartets No. 2, No. 12, and No. 9. . . . ¶ At 7:25: The Quartets No. 3, No. 16, and No. 8. (**NOTE:** The remaining quartets will be performed on March 14.)



Pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, performing in recital at Carnegie Hall.

LARA TOMLIN

Mark Kosower—The cellist performs sonatas by Poulenc and Beethoven (his Third), in addition to works by Frescobaldi, Ginastera, and Miklós Rózsa. Pianist Hie-Yon Choi assists. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. March 7 at 5.)

Lyric Piano Quartet—The foursome performs quartets by Turina, Fauré (in C Minor), and Strauss. (Weill Recital Hall. March 8 at 8.)

Rialto Ensemble—"De Profundis" are the opening words of Psalm 130 (or 129, to those who follow the Latin Vulgate numbering), a text that has proved irresistible to composers: the cosmic vision of its opening phrase—"Out of the depths I cry to thee"—seems custom-made for musical interpretation. This concert offers organ, solo-vocal, and choral "De Profundis" settings by, among others, Bach, Hovhaness, and Honegger (his "Mimaamaquim," a setting of the psalm's Hebrew text), with readings from Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" interspersed. (St. James Church, Madison Ave. at 71st St. March 8 at 8. For information about tickets, call 288-4100.)

Paul O'Dette—The lutenist, whose recorded traversal (on five Harmonia Mundi disks) of the complete lute works of John Dowland bespeaks a dream match of composer and performer, here plays a generous helping of the composer's solo pieces. (Weill Recital Hall. March 9 at 8.)

Concertante Chamber Players—The ensemble offers Borodin's String Sextet, Brahms's F-Major String Quintet, and Elgar's Piano Quintet. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 9 at 8.)

Pacific String Quartet—The winners of the 1998 Naumberg Chamber Music Award perform Mendelssohn's Quartet in E Minor, Jennifer Higdon's "Voices," and Beethoven's C-Major Quartet (Op. 59, No. 3). (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 9 at 8.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

OMEGA ENSEMBLE: Chamber works by Beethoven, Debussy, Brahms, and Stuart Jones. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 3 at 8.) . . . **LUNCH-TIME SOUNDS:** Flutist Jeanne Galway, cellist Käthe Jarke, and pianist Jonathan Feldman perform trios. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. March 4 at 1. Admission by contribution.) . . . **MARILYN NEELY AND ANDREW GERLE:** Duo-pianists. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. 289-4100. March 4 at 8.) . . . **AMATO OPERA COMPANY:** "Un Ballo in Maschera." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. March 6 at 7:30 and March 7 at 2:30.) . . . **CLEMENTE TRIO:** Piano trios by Beethoven and Brahms. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. March 7 at 11 A.M. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.) . . . **ALL-BRAHMS:** A program that includes his Horn Trio. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. March 7 at noon.) . . . **NORTH/SOUTH CONSONANCE:** Music by Bernard Rands, Raoul Pleskow, and others. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. March 7 at 3. No tickets necessary.) . . . **ALL SEASONS CHAMBER PLAYERS:** Chamber works by Mozart, Hindemith, and Dohnányi. (Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, Madison Ave. at 73rd St. March 7 at 4. Admission by contribution.) . . . **MAXIM PHILIPPOV:** Performing piano works by Schumann and Rachmaninoff. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 8 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Readings—March 3 at 7: By poets Donald Hall and Susan Wheeler. (Vanderbilt Hall, New York University, 40 Washington Square S., at Macdougal St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 3 at 8: By John O'Donohue, a Roman Catholic scholar who lives on an island in a lake in the west of Ireland, from his latest work, "Eternal Echoes: Exploring Our Yearning to Belong." (Rocky Sullivan's, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 4 at 7: By Denis Johnson and Jean Valentine, from their poetry. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. Tickets at the door.)

Talks—March 6 at 7:30: Photographer John Ranard, recently returned from Moscow, discusses drugs and H.I.V. in the former Soviet Union. (Tribes Gallery, 285 E. 3rd St., second floor. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 9 at 6:30: Arthur Bankoff, chairman of the department of anthropology and archeology at Brooklyn College, talks about what's in the soil in the outer boroughs. (Zoo School Auditorium, Fifth Ave. at 64th St. For reservations, call 360-8282.) . . . ¶ March 9 at 7:30: D.j.s from Steal This Radio, WJMZ, Free 103, and other pirate radio stations talk about outwitting the F.C.C. and other tricks of their trade. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St. Admission by contribution.)

Tour—March 7 at 1: Edwin Dunbaugh, a maritime historian, and James Gallagher, the owner of a ferryboat named the Yankee, lead a stroll about the decks of the vessel, which between 1919 and 1939 was used to go to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty and is currently undergoing restoration. (Pier 25, West St. at North Moore St. No tickets necessary.)

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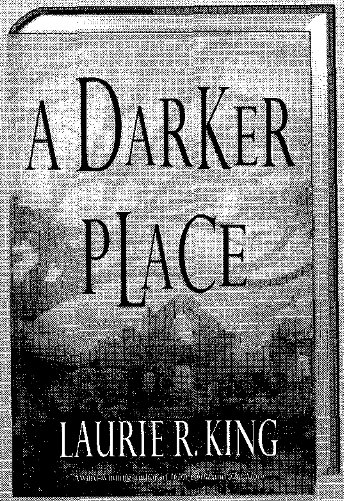

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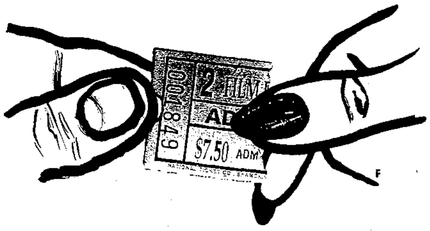

THE MOVIES

OPENING

ANALYZE THIS—A comedy about a gangster (Robert De Niro) and his psychiatrist (Billy Crystal). Directed by Harold Ramis. Opening March 5. (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

CRUEL INTENTIONS—A modern-day version of "Les Liaisons Dangereuses," with Sarah Michelle Gellar, Ryan Phillippe, Reese Witherspoon, and Selma Blair. Directed by Roger Kumbel. Opening March 5. (Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Union Square.)

DANCEMAKER—Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening March 3.

LOCK, STOCK AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 5. (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

RELAX . . . IT'S JUST SEX—A romantic comedy about a group of gay, lesbian, and straight friends. Directed by P. J. Castellaneta. Opening March 5. (Quad Cinema.)

Opening March 3 at Film Forum, Matthew Diamond's "Dancemaker."

RICCARDO VECCHIO

SIX WAYS TO SUNDAY—A black comedy (based on Charles Perry's novel "Portrait of a Young Man Drowning") about a boy's indoctrination into a Midwestern Jewish crime family. Directed by Adam Bernstein. Opening March 5. (Angelika Film Center.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

AFFLICTION—Nick Nolte, committing himself to a difficult part with a manly readiness that inspires affection, even awe, is Wade Whitehouse, a divorced policeman and hired hand floundering badly in a snowbound New Hampshire town. Both kindly and belligerent, Wade misses the meaning and rhythm of events, and reacts too much or too little, erupting in anger over what he should laugh off, ridiculing what he should take seriously. Writer-director Paul Schrader flinches at nothing and takes us deep into the texture and causes of this man's failure. With James Coburn as Wade's horrifying father, Willem Dafoe as his brother, Sissy Spacek as his girlfriend, and Mary Beth Hurt as his ex-wife. Schrader adapted Russell Banks's 1989 novel himself.—*David Denby* (1/11/99) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CENTRAL STATION—Against her nature, Dora (Fernanda Montenegro), an intelligent but nihilistic old bag—a retired schoolteacher who writes letters for illiterate people and then never mails them—leaves Rio de Janeiro with a little boy in tow and takes to the road. The boy's mother has been killed, and his desire to see his missing father stirs something in Dora. The two of them are practically hoboes, but once they leave Rio life opens up for them. This shrewd, tough, and bighearted Brazilian movie, directed by Walter Salles, moves surely and convincingly from utter negation to something like guarded optimism. In Portuguese.—*D.D.* (11/30/98) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

CHILDREN OF HEAVEN—An Iranian boy, Ali (Amir Farrokh Hashemian), loses a pair of pink shoes in the streets of Teheran. The shoes belong to his younger sister, Zahra (Bahare Sediqi), who, because their family is poor, has no hope of getting replacements. For a while, the children share a single pair of sneakers; finally, Ali enters a long-distance footrace in an attempt to win another pair (by coming in third). At this point, Majid Majidi's slight and careful film veers into the hokey—the sight of Ali stumbling in slow motion across the finish line is pure Hollywood, and old-fashioned Hollywood at that. Whenever the action flags, Majidi tends to get out of trouble with a closeup of Ali's tear-smeared face. Still, the movie toughens up as it moves outward from its tender hero to the world beyond. When Ali and his father take a bicycle trip from their poor district to the whitened gleam of the suburbs, they might as well be heading for Mars. In Farsi.—*Anthony Lane* (2/15/99) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DANCEMAKER—Director Matthew Diamond profiles the American choreographer Paul Taylor, and the result is freer than the usual stolid arts documentary—rather like the instinctual, unpretentious style of Taylor's work itself. Interviews with Taylor and his dancers, shots of stop-and-go rehearsals, archive footage of Taylor as a lonely kid growing up on a farm, and stills of him as a star soloist with Martha Graham in the late fifties all amplify one theme: Taylor is an artist whose instrument is other artists. There's a poignant, uncomfortable intimacy to his creative process; watching his troupe at work over the years is like watching lovers come together and drift apart.—*Sarah Kerr* (Film Forum; starting March 3.)

8MM—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, Union Square, and Waverly.)

Elizabeth—A grisly, flamboyant account of the Virgin Queen's early days as a monarch. Screenwriter Michael Hirst alters and conflates events that took place over many years—by degrees, Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett), a Protestant surrounded by powerful Catholics, takes control of England by pulling off a kind of internal coup d'état. The means of her ascension is Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), a perfect Machiavellian character who serves the Queen as adviser, deadly assassin, and spy. Elizabeth's climb to power, however, is a personal disaster: the supple-waisted maiden with long red hair becomes stiff and harsh, emerging from her youth white-faced and trapped in the armor of a thick brocade dress. The movie is a horror film masquerading as a historical pageant. Directed by Shekhar Kapur.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Regency.)

Hilary and Jackie—Anand Tucker's film takes us through the politely fraught story of the cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her sister Hilary. We see them first as young girls, and follow their rivalry; Hilary, the sensible flutist, is gradually outstripped by her more impassioned sister. The sense of period, of ungainly English pride, is funny and acute, but the movie mislays its sense of wit as the girls grow up. The nub of the tale, in which the now famous Jackie (Emily Watson) starts up a rural threesome with Hilary (Rachel Griffiths) and Hilary's husband, Kiffer Finzi (David Morrissey), feels both overblown and oddly beside the point; it certainly means that Tucker takes his eye, or his ear, off the music.—*A.L.* (1/18/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Kundun (1997)—Martin Scorsese's examination of the early life of the Dalai Lama. The film is far too long, and viewers may be frustrated by its frequently shifting tone; yet, in a way, a shifting tone is just the right treatment for a religion that emphasizes serene detachment over emotion. And, visually, this may be the director's richest feast since "Raging Bull."—*S.K.* (Walter Reade Theatre; March 5.)

Life Is Beautiful—Would that it were. The great, donkey-faced Italian clown Roberto Benigni attempts an ambitious fable of comedy's redemptive power. He plays an Italian Jew who keeps alive his little boy's innocence in a Nazi concentration camp by pretending that the routines of the camp are no more than an intricate game staged for his son's benefit. But Benigni's ironic counter-reality undermines this movie, not the Nazis, who were beyond ridicule for the same reason that they were beyond rationality. Totalitarianism makes the fantastic literal—that is its demonic appeal. Benigni's jokes and games just aren't enough, and you leave the movie thinking that what's touching is not Benigni's ministrations to the little boy but his own need to believe in comedy as salvation. With Giorgio Cantarini, who has the heartbreaking quality of the children in the old neorealist movies, as the boy. In Italian.—*D.D.* (11/16/98) (Angelika Film Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Paris, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 72nd Street East.)

The Madness of King George (1995)—Alan Bennett's play, translated to the screen (directed, as onstage, by Nicholas Hytner), about the decline of the King of England (Nigel Hawthorne), in the years 1788-89, from cheerful disciplinarian to lewd, unsleeping ranter. It's a fine dramatic predicament—and that's how it stays, never really pressing forward or pulling us into a plot. But there is plenty of relish here—in Ian Holm's fierce turn as a country physician, and in Hawthorne's blend of thundering and whimpers. With Helen Mirren (underused) and Rupert Everett (overweight).—*A.L.* (Walter Reade Theatre; March 9.)

Message in a Bottle—Slop made respectable by the application of sombre good taste. Robin Wright Penn is a lonely Chicago newspaperwoman who, on a Cape Cod beach, picks up a bottle containing a letter in which a man apologizes fervently to his wife for not taking better care of her. It seems that this mournful-moony romantic is dotting the seven seas with his remorse. Wright Penn searches for him, and he turns out to be Kevin Costner, widowed and in retreat—withdrawn, surly, but shining with inner nobility. They commence a nuzzling, tepid affair that consists of much leaning against driftwood around campfires—they could be the impersonally handsome models in an ad for expensive sweaters. The director, Luis Mandoki, working from a dreadful best-seller by Nicholas Sparks, has entered the land of "women's films," but his picture lacks the emotional volatility and intelligence of work by such predecessors as King Vidor and Michael Curtiz. This movie is merely glum. As Wright Penn flutters nervously, Costner gives her nothing, letting her die on the vine. It's an extremely ungallant performance. With Paul Newman and Illeana Douglas.—*D.D.* (2/22 & 3/1/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Union Square.)

October Sky—An inspirational story of a fairly conventional sort—four boys stuck in a West Virginia coal town in 1957 begin playing around with rockets and compete for a science prize—has been made into something square but stirring by filmmakers who get the look and shape of things right. The skies are gray, and a wrought-iron tipple sits at the mouth of the mine like a gallows. The boys, expected by their elders to sacrifice their lives to coal mining when they graduate from high school, escape by sending up the little projectiles they've made, which sometimes explode, sometimes whirl about in circles, and occasionally soar straight up; when that happens, director Joe Johnston, imitating Steven Spielberg, makes the awestruck spectators rise into the frame, mouths open, eyes wide. The little rockets become the poetry of a depressed community. With Jake Gyllenhaal as the leader of the boys and the leathery, serious Chris Cooper as his heroic dad. Screenwriter Lewis Colick adapted the recent memoir "Rocket Boys," by retired NASA engineer Homer Hickam, Jr.—*D.D.* (2/22 & 3/1/99) (Beekman, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Village East Cinemas.)

Payback—Every so often Mel Gibson likes to get down and dirty for one of his unglamorous roles; the last such occasion was "Ransom," and now he appears as Porter, a grim-faced criminal who was cheated of seventy thousand dollars by his wife (Deborah Kara Unger) and his associate (Gregg Henry). The movie, which delights in its low-lit scumminess, follows Porter on a quest to retrieve his money and, more broadly, to assert his determined free spirit. This entails the indifferent slaughter of those who stand in his way—men from the Outfit, for example, a mysterious cabal that holds their city in its clutches. The picture was filmed mostly in Chicago, although the place is never named, and the writer and director is Brian Helgeland, although he was ousted from the project before the end;

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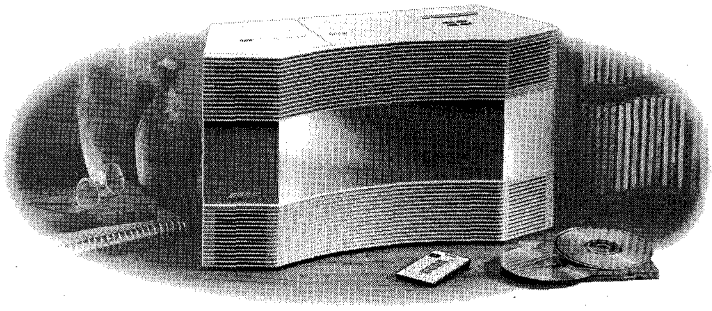

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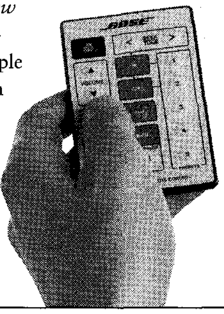

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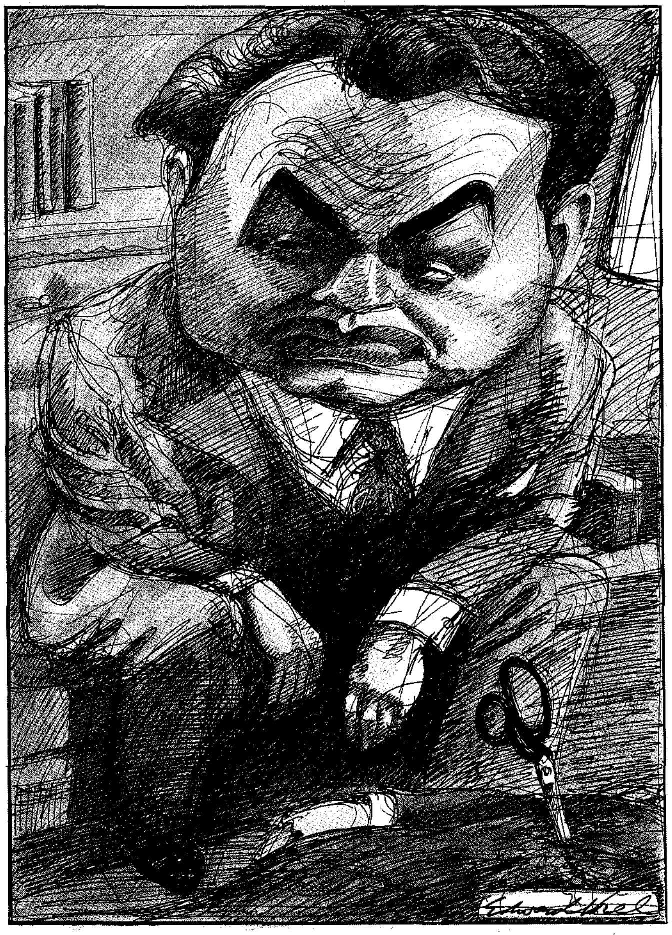

EDWARD SOREL

HARDBOILED CHAMELEON: *Although Edward G. Robinson made his name playing a Capone-like crime boss, he funnelled his bristling vitality into a surprising variety of roles, and many can be savored during the current Robinson retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1930 and 1931, he went from being the really bad guy in Mervyn LeRoy's "Little Caesar" to the good-bad guy in LeRoy's "Five Star Final"; in that film, as the managing editor of a desperate New York tabloid, Robinson is a paragon of savvy. He could be equally forceful as a man of conscience or as a victim. In Billy Wilder's "Double Indemnity," his wily insurance investigator preys on the mind of a sexually corrupted work pal (Fred MacMurray) like a cross between Sherlock Holmes and Jiminy Cricket. And in Fritz Lang's "The Woman in the Window," Robinson brings us so excruciatingly close to a timid professor who murders in self-defense and then bungles the coverup that the ludicrous Hollywood ending comes as a relief.*

reports are that almost a third of it was rewritten and reshot. No surprise, then, that the result should be a mess: half-jokey and dumbly violent, with performances that flail all over the place. (Special mention should go to the twitching of Gregg Henry's facial muscles.) The script was based on Richard Stark's novel "The Hunter," which was also the source of the 1967 Lee Marvin movie "Point Blank." If you're looking for an existential hero on a revenge kick, Marvin is still your man.—*A.L.* (2/15/99) (Astor Plaza, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Shakespeare in Love—A ripely emotional comedy-fantasia—concocted by director John Madden and screenwriters Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard—of how Shakespeare came to write "Romeo and Juliet." In 1593, young Will (Joseph Fiennes), a stud with liquid eyes and full lips, is just an unhappy and unproductive hack, jealous of the greater Christopher Marlowe (Rupert Everett). At first the movie comes at us too broadly, with many facetiously anachronistic jokes about the grubby professional routines of the theatre. But Will falls in love with the fictional heiress Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and when these two poeticizing lovers climb into bed, and Shakespeare's quill begins to fly, the cleverness catches fire and "Shakespeare in Love" turns into an exciting literary-erotic entertainment. With Geoffrey Rush as the theatre manager Henslowe and Judi Dench as a supremely intelligent and wittily dominating Queen Elizabeth.—*D.D.* (12/21/98) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Strange Days (1995)—The year 2000 is hours away, the streets of Los Angeles are erupting with civil strife, and ex-cop Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes) has just received what appears to be evidence of police racism, rape, and murder. Enlisting the help of Max (Tom Sizemore) and Mace (Angela Bassett), Lenny sets out to crack the case. But for the director, Kathryn Bigelow, the case is mainly an excuse to let it rip: this is her loudest, most relentlessly wired movie to date. Some of the actors head straight over the top, too—Juliette Lewis is unwatchable in the role of Lenny's old girlfriend. But Fiennes holds steady; his moody, lonely performance lends the story an air of calm despair.—*A.L.* (Walter Reade Theatre; March 8.)

ALSO PLAYING

ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE (reviewed in our issue of 1/25/99): Village East Cinemas. . . . **BLAST FROM THE PAST:** Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square. . . . **CONCEIVING ADA:** Cinema Village. . . . **GOD SAID, "HA!":** Film Forum. . . . **GODS AND MONSTERS** (11/9/98): Metro Cinema and Quad Cinema. . . . **JAWBREAKER:** Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square. . . . **JUST THE TICKET:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square. . . . **THE LAST DAYS:** 62nd & Broadway. . . . **LITTLE VOICE:** Chelsea Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, and Union Square. . . . **MY FAVORITE MARTIAN:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Sutton, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **OFFICE SPACE:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, and 64th and 2nd. . . . **THE OTHER SISTER:** Chelsea West, Cinema I, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **RUSHMORE** (12/7-14/98): Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, State, Sutton, and Union Square. . . . **SAVING PRIVATE RYAN** (8/3/98): First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square. . . . **THE SCHOOL OF FLESH:** BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema Village, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **A SIMPLE PLAN:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **TANGO:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE THIN RED LINE** (12/28/98 & 1/4/99): Union Square and Ziegfeld. . . . **200 CIGARETTES:** East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films directed by Alfred Hitchcock. March 3-4: "Rope" (1948). . . . March 5-6: "Marnie" (1964). . . . March 7-8: "Vertigo" (1958). . . . From March 9: "Saboteur" (1942).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films featuring Edward G. Robinson. March 4 at 2:30 and March 7 at 1: "Little Caesar" (1930, Mervyn LeRoy). . . . March 4 at 6 and March 7 at 3: "The Woman in the Window" (1945, Fritz Lang). . . . March 5 at 2:30 and March 9 at 6: "The Bright Shawl" (1923, John S. Robertson; silent). . . . March 5 and March 8 at 6: "Five Star Final" (1931, LeRoy). . . . March 5 at 8: "Double Indemnity" (1944, Billy Wilder). . . . March 6 at 1: "The Hole in the Wall" (1929, Robert Florey). . . . March 6 at 3: "The Red House" (1947, Delmer Daves). . . . March 6 at 5 and March 9 at 2:30: "Night Has a Thousand Eyes" (1948, John Farrow). . . . March 7 at 5: "Scarlet Street" (1946, Lang). . . . March 8 at 2:30: "Unholy Partners" (1941, LeRoy). . . . ¶ March 5 at 3, 6, and 8; March 6 at 1:30, 3:30, and 5:30; and March 7 at 1, 3, and 5: *Eight different programs in a series of British documentary short films.*

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A program of films directed by Gillo Pontecorvo; most in Italian, with English subtitles. March 3 at 2 and 9: "Operation Ogre" (1979). . . . March 4 at 2: "The Battle of Algiers" (1966; in French). . . . ¶ *A series about production and costume design, with film showings, panel discussions (March 6 at 8, March 7 at 6:30, and March 9 at 8:30), and appearances by the designers themselves.* March 5 at 4: "Kundun" (†), with production designer Dante Ferretti appearing at 6:30. . . . March 5 at 8:30: "Petulia" (1968, Richard Lester). Production designer Tony Walton will appear March 6 at 6. . . .March 8 at 3: "The Last Emperor: The Director's Cut" (1987, Bernardo Bertolucci). Costume designer James Acheson will appear March 7 at 8:30. . . .March 8 at 9: "Strange Days" (†). Costume designer Ellen Mirojnik will appear March 7 at 4. . . .March 9 at 4: "The Madness of King George" (†). Production designer Ken Adams will appear March 9 at 6:30. . . . ¶ March 8 at 7: Industrial Light and Magic art-department manager Susan Davis and art director Alex Laurant will be present.

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by or about Richard Lester. March 6 at 2: "Richard Lester!" (1998, Stacy Cochran). . . .March 6 at 3:30: "A Hard Day's Night" (1964). . . .March 6 at 5:30: "The Knack . . . and How to Get It" (1965). . . .March 7 at 2: "Help!" (1965). . . . March 7 at 4: "How I Won the War" (1967).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 9 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Nénette et Boni" (1996, Claire Denis; in French).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.—Through March 11: The 15th Annual Israel Film Festival. (For information about show times, call 532-2075.)

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On March 7 at 7, the feature will be "Xanadu" (1980, Robert Greenwald).

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

"I LOVE YOU LIKE ME OWN BLOOD CAUSE YE ARE, *But* LET THE MASH WATER TOP 180° AND I'LL PADDLE YE ARSE RED."

-William Grant, Founder Sharing The Love With His Son, Charlie, 1892

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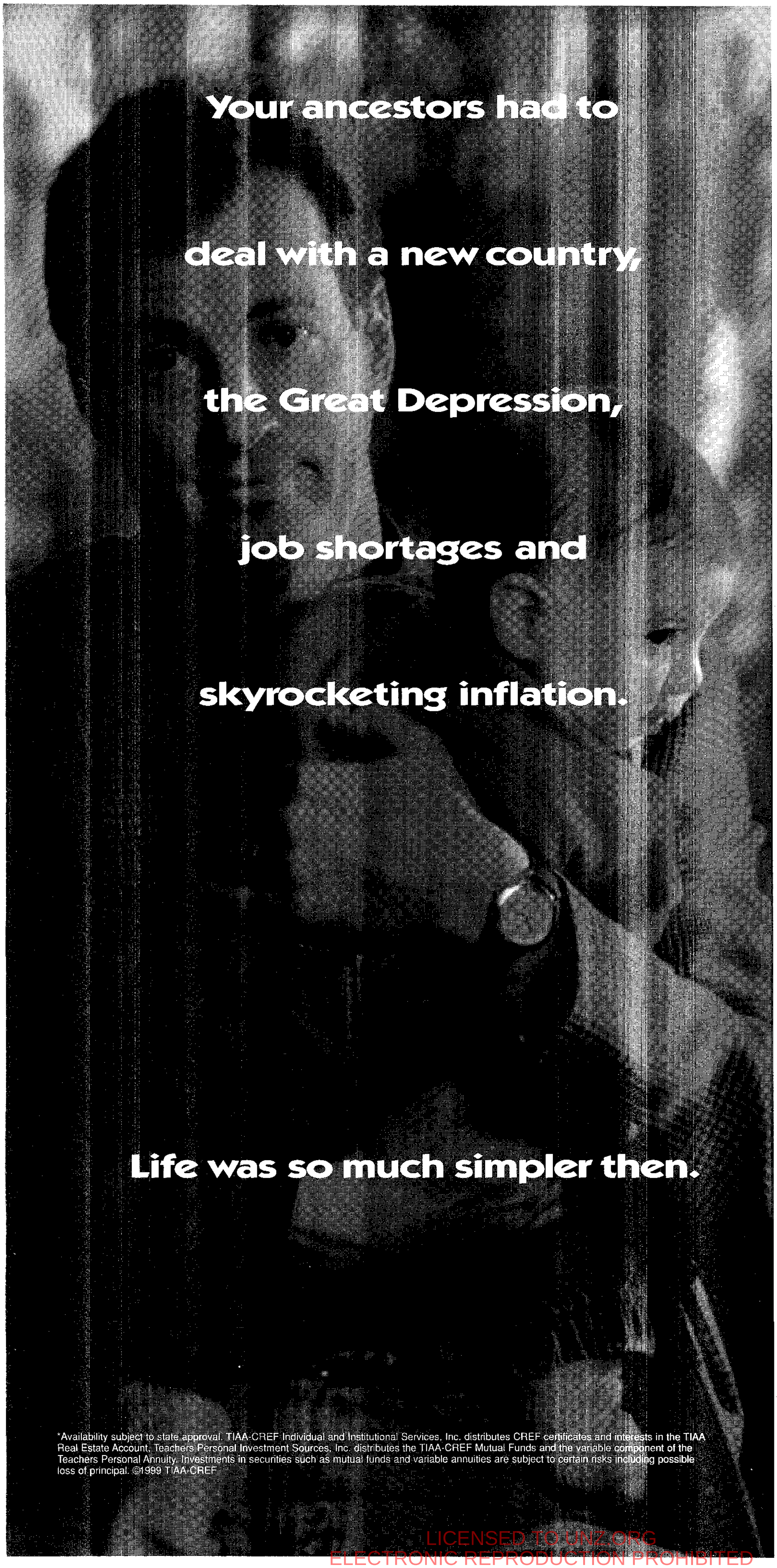

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Drunk drivers and other dangers.

LAST week, New York City began confiscating the automobiles of people caught drinking and driving. On the first day of the crackdown, the police seized three cars, including one from a man who had been arrested for drunk driving on eight previous occasions. The tabloids cheered. Mothers Against Drunk Driving nodded in approval. After a recent series of brutal incidents involving the police tarnished the Giuliani administration, the Mayor's anti-crime crusade appeared to right itself. The city now has the toughest anti-drunk-driving policy in the country, and the public was given a welcome reminder that the vast majority of the city's thirty-eight thousand cops are neither racist nor reckless and that the justice they mete out is largely deserved. "There's a very simple way to stay out of this problem, for you, your family, and anyone else," a triumphant Giuliani said. "Do not drink and get behind the wheel of a car."

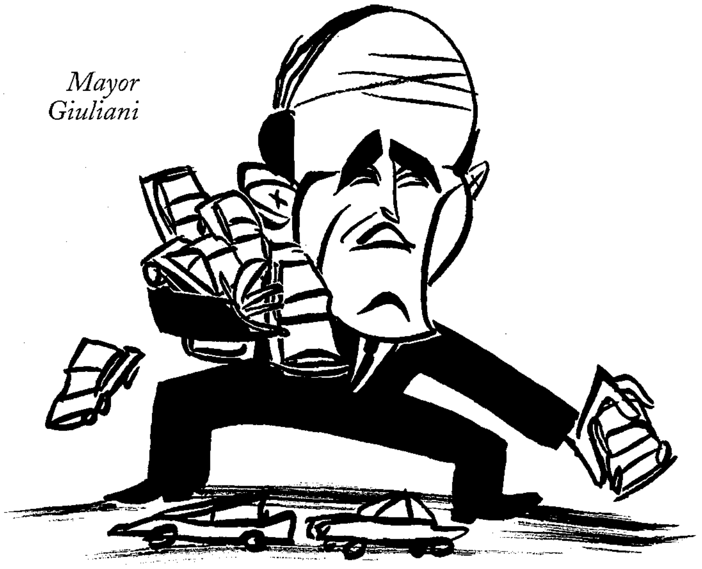
Let's leave aside, for a moment, the question of whether the new policy is constitutional. That is a matter for the courts. A more interesting issue is what the willing acceptance of such a hard-line stance on drunk driving says about the sometimes contradictory way we discuss traffic safety. Suppose, for example, that I was stopped by the police for running a red light on Madison Avenue. I would get points on my license and receive a fine. If I did the same thing while my blood-alcohol level was above the prescribed limit, however, I would be charged with drunk driving and lose my car. The behavior is the same in both cases, but the consequences are very different. We believe, as a society, that the combination of alcohol and driving deserves particular punishment. And that punishment isn't necessarily based on what you have actually done. It's often based on what you could do—or, to be more precise, on the extra potential for harm that your drinking poses.

There is nothing wrong with this approach. We have laws against threatening people with guns for the same reason. It hardly makes sense to wait for drunks or people waving guns to kill someone before we arrest them. But if merely posing a threat to others on the road is the threshold for something as drastic as civil forfeiture, then why are we stopping with drunks?

Fifty per cent of all car accidents in the United States are attributed to driver inattention, for example. Some of that inattention is caused by inebriation, but there are other common and obvious distractions. Two studies made in the past three years—the first conducted at the Rochester Institute of Technology and the second published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*—suggest that the use of car phones is associated with a four-to-fivefold increase in the risk of accidents, and that hands-free phones may not be any safer than conventional ones. The driver on the phone is a potential risk to others, just as the driver who has been drinking is.

It is also now abundantly clear that sport-utility vehicles and pickup trucks can—by virtue of their weight, high clearance, and structural rigidity—do far more damage in an accident than conventional automobiles can. S.U.V.s and light trucks account for about a third of the vehicles on the road. But a hugely disproportionate number of the fatalities in two-vehicle crashes are caused by collisions between those bigger vehicles and conventional automobiles, and the people riding in the cars make up a stunning eighty-one per cent of those killed.

The reason we don't like drunk drivers is that by making the decision to drink and drive an individual deliberately increases his or her chance of killing someone else with a vehicle. But how is the moral culpability of the countless Americans who have walked into a dealership and made a decision to buy a fifty-six-hundred-pound sport utility any different? Of course, there are careful S.U.V. drivers and careful car-phone users. Careful people can get



Mayor Giuliani

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

drunk, too, and overcompensate for their impairment by creeping along at twenty-five miles an hour, and in New York City we won't hesitate to take away *their* vehicles.

Obviously, Giuliani, even in his most crusading moments, isn't about to confiscate all the car phones and S.U.V.s on the streets of New York. States should, however, stop drivers from using car phones while the car is in motion, as some countries, including England, do. And a prohibitive weight tax on sport utilities would probably be a good idea. The moneys collected could be used to pay the medical bills and compensate the family of anyone hit by some cell-phone-wielding yuppie in a four-wheeled behemoth.

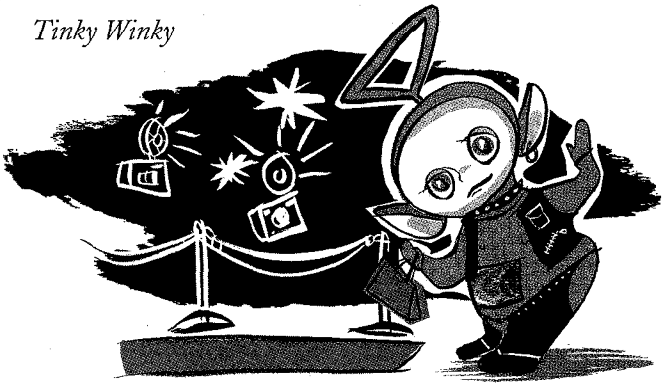
—MALCOLM GLADWELL

DEPT. OF BAD RELATIONSHIPS

The love that dare not say "eh-oh."

So many prominent gay couples have come forward of late, proudly proclaiming their love—Ellen and Anne, Elton John and David Furnish, Prince Charles and that rugged, leathery fellow he's finally been photographed with. So it's time I confessed, freely and without shame: Tinky Winky was my lover.

Tinky, the tallest and, to me, most vividly sensual of the popular Teletubbies video clan, was outed recently by the Reverend Jerry Falwell, who claimed that Tinky's lavender hue and the rigid triangle sprouting from his head indicated a coded homosexuality that was being transmitted to young viewers. I am particularly disturbed that Falwell would launch a sexual smear campaign against someone already named Tinky Winky.



Tinky Winky

But enough tabloid infighting. To me, Tinky wasn't a star, or a political football, or some sad English actor suffocating inside a dumpy purple blob suit: he was hot. I didn't just watch Tinky's TV show; I bought the books, each title more arousing than the last—"Dipsy Dances," "Four Happy Teletubbies," "Go Po Go!"—culminating in the inevitable erotic explosion of "Tubby Custard Mess." I wanted Tinky, I wanted him bad, as he group-hugged and cavorted through the greensward of Teletubbyland, swinging a red patent-leather purse, or, as his producers have dubbed it, his "magic bag." My mind reeled: Just what was in that bag? Pills? Kleenex? Magic cosmetics? I had to know.

I should add that Tinky was not my first celebrity crush. I'd spent a few torrid years experimenting with Eeyore, Babar, and the exhausting Curious George, and I can thank Viagra for that Catskills weekend with the Little Engine That Could. I dated both Magic Earring Ken and Olympic Figure Skater Ken, and had my heart shattered by Still Closeted Media Mogul Ken. He wasn't a happy man, and I remember long, anguished 2 A.M. heart-to-hearts on my Fisher-Price cell phone, where we discussed our admiration for Rupert Everett and Ian McKellen. "But it's different for them! They're English!" Ken would wail. "I'm Mattel!"

I eventually met Tinky at an industry function. I was with the Blue Power Ranger, but by midnight I was sharing a Jacuzzi with Tinky, Laa-Laa, and Dipsy. Po was off in a corner moaning her way through "The Cat in the Hat." "Kitty porn," Dipsy explained. Finally, Tink and I were alone. I reached out to caress his triangle, and he began to sob quietly. "It's been a long time for you, hasn't it?" I murmured, and he took my face in his mittenlike paws and said, simply, "Eh-oh." As for the rest of our evening together, I will share only this: Tinky is the perfect lover, because after sex he turns into a TV.

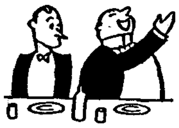
Our affair deepened over time, and we even talked about adopting some Cabbage Patch Kids. "But we'll give them a sense of their true racial heritage," I told Tinky. "We'll say, 'We love you very much, but your real mom was an avocado.' " Ultimately, Tinky's stardom came between us: I felt slighted and resentful when a snotty Brentwood four-year-old pushed me aside to gush at my beloved. "Who are you?" the toddler smirked. "Tinky's assistant?" "I'm his life partner!" I protested as Tinky's manager, Hoho, elbowed me away from the cameras. "Tinky has an image to protect," Hoho informed me. "Blank-faced and near-mute, but still yearningly available, like Costner." It all came to a head after a photo op at F. A. O. Schwarz, where Tinky was snapped between a fawning Baby Bop and a hopelessly needy Tickle-Me Elmo. "Tickle yourself!" I told Tinky, and he gazed at me sadly, waved, and fell down.

It needs to be said: Tinky Winky is a hero, and an ideal role model for any child without toes or genitalia. And, as for me, well, lately I've been seeing Furby, who's taking his first brave steps after that public-rest-room entrapment incident, where the police burst in and tried to flush him. Please, everyone, just let us love.

—PAUL RUDNICK

INK

At Le Cirque, a four-star, five-course summit on the meaning of life.



When Matthieu Ricard went to Le Cirque for the first time recently, he was taken aback by the guard stationed at the gate of the New York Palace Hotel in full toy-soldier regalia, with red coat, gold buttons, and shiny black boots. "Interesting," Ricard muttered as he passed by. The guard might have said the same about Ricard, who was dressed in a manner usually unseen in Sirio's domain, with shaved head and long saffron robes. Ricard, a fifty-three-year-old Frenchman turned Buddhist monk, was in New York with his father, the political writer Jean-François Revel, to promote a book that they have co-authored, entitled "The Monk and the Philosopher." The book, which was a best-seller in France and has been translated into eighteen languages, makes for a lively and engaging read, even if you are neither a French intellectual nor a Buddhist. It is a transcription of conversations the two men had about the meaning of life at a resort hotel high above Kathmandu. Revel, who is well known in France for taking on the left-wing intelligentsia in books such as "Without Marx or Jesus," and Ricard, who was a molecular biologist before taking his vows, discussed Karma, Nirvana, reincarnation, and the necessity (or otherwise) of dissolving the ego; the Western quest for scientific progress was pitted against the Eastern pursuit of inner peace.

Père and *fils* landed at Le Cirque on the recommendation of their publisher, Arthur Samuelson, of Schocken Books, who is married to Molly O'Neill, the food columnist for the *Times Magazine*. "The chef is Cambodian and he is a Buddhist, and Molly says that all the great French chefs watch him very, very carefully," Ricard said as he was led into Adam Tihany's exuberant dining room, past a sign saying that jacket and tie were required, and past the power lunchers already at their tables.

Ricard, who is twinkly-eyed in a beatific kind of way, moved to Asia in 1972 and now lives in Nepal; he translates Tibetan works into English and French, and also serves as a translator for the Dalai Lama on his travels. Ricard remarked that he didn't really miss French cultural life. "I had my fill of it," he said gleefully. But as the soup course was served (vegetable for the non-meat-eating monk; curried lobster and cauliflower for the philosopher) he became even more twinkly than usual. His regular diet, he explained, was a breakfast of Tibetan tea, made with butter and salt and barley flour; a lunch of rice and vegetables; and no evening meal. "I usually hate to go out to lunch, because it takes two hours, and I usually eat in ten minutes," he said. "But this is *wonderful*."

Revel, whose books include "Culture and Cuisine: A Journey Through the History of Food," and who is grumbly in a good-natured, Gallic manner, explained, over the second course of asparagus gratinée and morel mushrooms, that he had sampled Tibetan food while in Kathmandu. "It was very bad," said Revel, whose name differs from that of his son because when he wrote his first book, in the nineteen-fifties, he chose the name of his favorite restaurant as a nom de plume.

When the main course was served—sea bass with black-truffle shavings for the father, vegetables with black-truffle shavings for the son—Ricard was asked whether he was bothered by watching others eat meat. "It doesn't offend me," he said cheerily. "It might offend whoever is being eaten. But it's a bit late for that." Over cheese, the Dalai Lama was discussed; over dessert, the political situation in China. "If I have a cat, I try to keep it inside so that it will not get at the birds," Revel said, by way of analogy to the condition of the Chinese people. "But there is an instinct for freedom: the cat wants to go out. So the question is, how much suffering and how much time will it take for that to happen?" If the kitchen of Le Cirque was any indication, there are no limits to the potential for free expression: dessert was a chocolate "stove"—a cake in the shape of an oven, complete with saucepans filled with fruit syrups. "Incredible!" breathed Ricard serenely as the last plate was cleared. "This was probably the best lunch I have had in my life."

—REBECCA MEAD

COUNTRY MUSIC

Oh Monica, you Monica
 In your little black beret,
You beguiled our saintly Billy
 And led that creep astray.

He'd never seen thong underpants
 Or met a Valley girl;
He was used to Southern women,
 Like good old Minnie Pearl.

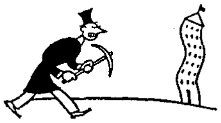
You vamped him with your lingo,
 Your notes in purple ink,
And fed him "Vox" and bagels
 Until he couldn't think.

You were our Bill's Delilah
 Until Acquittal Day;
You're his-tor-y now, Monica,
 In your little black beret.

—JOHN UPDIKE

GOOD NEIGHBORS DEPT.

A building on Fifth loses its religion.



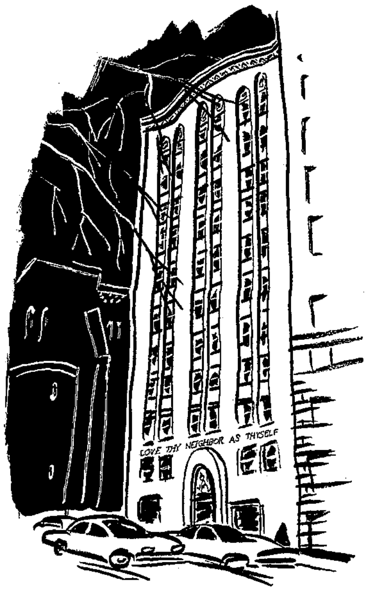
BUILDINGS are generally expected to speak for themselves, but the eleven-story structure at 838 Fifth Avenue, on the southeast corner of Sixty-fifth Street, has always had a little help. From the Old Testament, in fact. The building, which until recently housed the offices of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the organization of Reform synagogues, has two quotations carved in fifteen-inch-high letters on its limestone façade. "LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF," the building proclaims over its front door, on Fifth Avenue, and, on the somewhat longer side-street frontage, it says, "DO JUSTLY•LOVE MERCY•WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD."

Those commands are slightly weightier than the post office's earnest pledge about snow and rain and the gloom of night, which is surely the city's most famous architectural inscription. But the carved quotations on 838 Fifth Avenue have always inspired affection in their neighborhood—perhaps because no one usually gives lectures on morality to the residents of Fifth Avenue. Endearing though they may be, the inscriptions now present a problem. The Athena Group, a development company controlled by A. Alfred Taubman, who is the chairman of Sotheby's, and his son-in-law Louis Dubin, is converting the building into luxury condominiums, and Taubman is not so sure that "Love Thy Neighbor" is what you would call a perfect motto for a high-end New York City condo.

"I happen to think that it's nice to have on your house, but a lot of people might not think so," he said last week over the telephone. "They may not love their neighbor at all. It made sense when this was a religious building, but now it's going to be an apartment house for people of many religions, or no religion at all. I think they would rather the building not be so opinionated."

Taubman is in something of a bind. Keeping the Biblical inscriptions might be interpreted as extending the building's Jewish identity. But expunging the words "Love Thy Neighbor" from over the front door of an apartment house doesn't set the warmest or the most diplomatic tone for the building's future. The politics of New York City condominiums and coöperatives are nasty enough as it is.

Taubman said he wished that he could sell the condominiums first and then "let the people who will live there decide." But it has to be done now, as part of the reconstruction of the building, or not at all, since the façade is to be substantially rebuilt as part of the building's conversion into apartments. The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission has jurisdiction over the exterior, since it falls within the Upper East Side historic district, and the commission is at present considering whether to approve the proposed changes, which means that it will decide the fate of the inscriptions.


LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

The Biblical inscriptions are not the only issue regarding 838 Fifth Avenue's religious heritage that Taubman and his architect, John H. Beyer, of Beyer Blinder Belle, have to face. The building—designed in 1950 by Harry M. Prince and expanded in 1958—looks like a plain limestone box when you zip past it on Fifth Avenue, but the structure turns out to be full of religious symbolism. The façade has six vertical rows of windows topped by arches on the eleventh floor; the arches in the two center rows are unusually high and contain Hebrew symbols—a signboard version of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, looming over Fifth Avenue as if the building were on Mt. Sinai. Also, the top of the building is arched, so that the whole façade resembles a gigantic stone tablet. And there is a Star of David over the front door, the centerpiece of an abstract pattern carved in stone.

All these details are slated to disappear: the big arch will be replaced by a two-story penthouse, and the Ten Commandments arches will be reduced. Beyer says that the Star of David is likely to be covered by a medallion with the building's street number. The inscriptions, however, are something different—venerable neighborhood presences in themselves. Beyer admits to a fondness for the inscriptions, even though their days may be numbered.

"I would think that coming home to see 'Love Thy Neighbor' over the front door would be a joy," he said. "It's a great, lighthearted statement about the whole concept of condominiums. After all, who has more enemies than people in a condo?"

—PAUL GOLDBERGER

FAX FROM LOS ANGELES

In the kitchen with Ken Starr's West Coast doppelgänger.

SITTING at his kitchen counter in his gold-plated wheelchair the other day, Larry Flynt was thinking about what a crazy movie the last few months of his life would make. He was pale, having just got out of the hospital after a bout of pneumonia, but his sea-green eyes were almost unnaturally bright. As he leaned his head on one hand, flashing giant emerald and ruby rings and a diamond-encrusted watch, he looked like a decadent eighteenth-century monarch. Flynt was as surprised as the rest of the country when Bob Livingston stood up on the House floor on December 19th and announced that, with Flynt prepared to publish details about the Speaker-Elect's sex life, he was resigning from Congress, and the crippled fifty-six-year-old Los Angeles pornographer suddenly became one of the most feared men in Washington. The point was not that Flynt had entered the world of politics but that politics had entered the world of Flynt.

Larry Flynt says that he is doing nothing more than "holding up a mirror to the Republicans," showing them a world where the most intimate details of people's lives appear on the six-o'clock news—in other words, the world of the Starr report. "Henry Hyde and Ken Starr got in the mud first," he explained. "I just decided to jump in there along with them." He sees himself as taking the Independent Counsel's inquisition into people's private lives to its logical conclusion. He thought that if he could demonstrate that no one side could control this type of investigation he could send Congress a message that it would take more seriously than it seemed to be taking the voters: "I wanted them to look around and say, 'Hey, what are we doing?' "

Flynt's pink house is perched high in the Hollywood Hills, and when you walk through the gated door it's immediately apparent to what extent the eccentric millionaire has been living in his own world. The walls are covered in emerald velvet and the windows are stained glass. The darkened living room is cluttered with Tiffany lamps, paintings of nymphs, marble statues, silver goblets, and gilt mirrors.

But the scene in Flynt's kitchen is cozier and more domestic than one might expect. As Flynt sipped coffee out of a flowered mug, his wife, Liz, who has a short, sensible haircut, bustled by with an armful of laundry. His black schnauzer nuzzled his leg, and his elderly father shuffled past. A Martha Stewart cookbook peeked out from a pink drawer, and over the stove was a giant red heart bearing the words "Lizzy's Kitchen."

Flynt claims that he has people at the major networks and newspapers who pass along tips and leads that they can't use. It's as if he were operating as a kind of id for more respectable journalists: fulfilling their hidden urges, following through on their darker curiosities. Flynt himself is not interested in the moral ambiguities of his project. "In my life," he said, with a grin, "I've found that nothing changes someone's moral outlook more than cash in large sums."

The phone rang. Flynt's bodyguard and aide, Doug, leaned over and whispered something into his boss's ear. After Flynt hung up, he said, mischievously, "My White House contact."

What incriminating photographs or videotapes does Flynt have left? What is he planning to release in the Flynt report, in April? It almost doesn't matter. He has made the point that damaging information exists and can be bought and sold and disseminated. "I have no pretensions about what I am doing," Flynt said. "I am just a smut peddler who cares."

—KATIE ROIPHE

RIP VAN WINKLE DEPT.

Method acting brings the father of our country back to life.

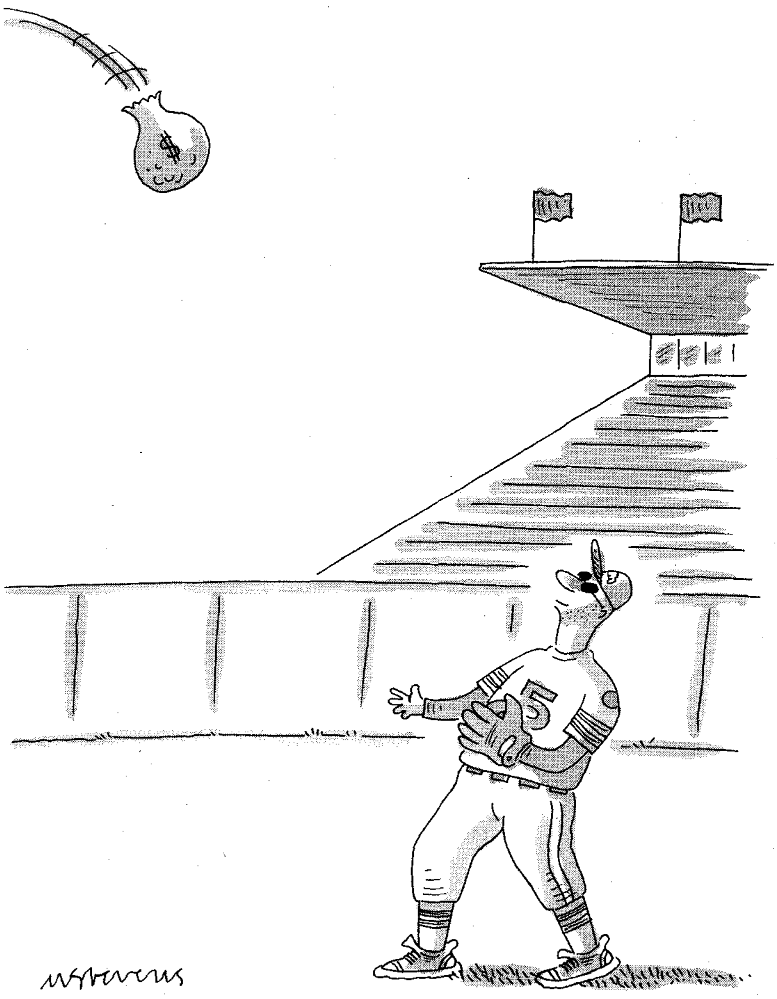
WILLIAM SOMMERFIELD, the premier George Washington interpreter of our time, was performing at the New-York Historical Society recently—or, rather, the General was receiving guests at Mount Vernon. Sommerfield—an athletic six-three, with blue eyes and big feet, like the General—arrived in Manhattan from his home, on Mt. Vernon Street in Philadelphia, with a big rolling suitcase containing his props and two eighteenth-century outfits, one for civilian wear (modelled on a Gilbert Stuart portrait) and a military uniform (the buff and blue of the Continental Army, after the Peale portrait). He carried his sword case separately. The night before, he had washed and set his long white hair, using sponge rollers, and that morning he brushed it back and tied it in a black ribbon, leaving what he called "curls upon the side," the style favored by the first President for formal occasions. He would no more be caught on the street with his hair in curlers than would General Washington.

This year—the bicentennial of his death—looks to be an especially busy one for the General. "Bookings are up twenty-five per cent," Sommerfield says. Events will culminate in a reënactment at Mount Vernon of Washington's funeral procession. But Sommerfield says he's staying away from that.

He got his big break in 1989, when Warren Burger, the retired Chief Justice of the United States, selected him to play the part of Washington in a reënactment of the first Inauguration to mark the Bicentennial of the Constitution. He beat out Charlton Heston for the role. ("I suspect he asked for too much money," Sommerfield says modestly.) He has since been embraced by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and is the only historical interpreter permitted to play George Washington on his own turf. "They trust me not to do anything inappropriate," he says. "No beer commercials."

As Sommerfield was getting ready for his performance at the Historical Society, he splashed on a little of his special scent, Washington No. 6. "Everything I do is historically accurate," he said. He always puts in his pocket a few calling cards bearing the florid Washington signature; sometimes children ask for his autograph, and though he can forge the signature, "there's the pen-and-ink problem." Because the auditorium at the New-York Historical Society is a little neoclassical gem, he didn't need his body mike. It would never do for George Washington to make his entrance holding a microphone à la Wayne Newton.

A tap came at the door, and a servant entered: "Five minutes, General." The General put on his tricorne, adjusted his sword, and picked up his riding crop. He stood at attention in the doorway at the rear of the auditorium as a three-man fife-and-drum corps piped him in. He engaged the audience immediately, in his best Tidewater accent: "Oh, good evening, Colonel, I didn't know you'd be here. The Colonel rode with me in the Battle of Brandywine. Fell off his horse." He told his life story as far as meeting Martha, and the rest, as they say, is history. —MARY NORRIS



SPRING TRAINING

ANNALS OF FINANCE

THE FIRM

Goldman, Sachs partners are the envy of Wall Street. Why are they preparing to throw out a century of history?

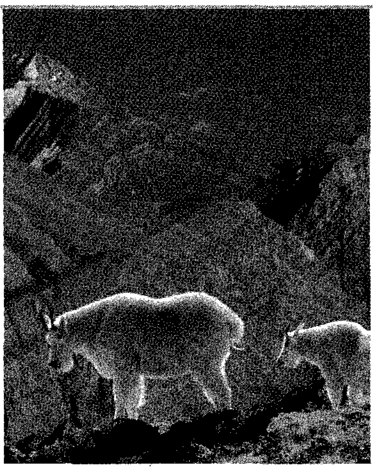
BY JOHN CASSIDY

On October 20, 1998, Goldman, Sachs & Company, the last big investment-banking partnership on Wall Street, selected its final class of partners. As is usual with Goldman, the ceremony was carried out with a minimum of fanfare. The firm simply issued a short press statement, and that was that. No group photographs were released. Nobody was made available for interviews. Financial reporters were left to ponder a list of fifty-seven names, which began with Bradley I. Abelow and ended with Yoel Zaoui—an exercise that wasn't altogether unrevealing. The number of Anglo-sounding names could be counted on two hands; about a third of the names sounded Jewish; another third or so sounded either Asian or vaguely European. Only three of the fifty-seven were women's names, but one of these, Abby Joseph Cohen, was the best known of the lot: Cohen is Goldman's chief investment strategist for the United States, and she has become a celebrity on Wall Street by repeatedly predicting that the stock market would keep going up. Most of the rest of the names fell into the time-honored pattern of Goldman partners: anonymous, diligent people who cultivated their superiors, kept their heads down, and eventually received their vast reward.

Just how vast is a subject of speculation in financial circles, where securing a partnership at Goldman is widely seen as the ultimate prize. Investment-banking firms earn their money by underwriting and issuing securities, such as stocks and bonds, for corporations and local governments; by trading such securities in the secondary markets; and by providing advice on mergers, acquisitions, and other financial matters. Last year, members of the penultimate partners' class, which was chosen in 1996, earned about $6 million each. Partners with longer tenure—they numbered a hundred and eighty-nine—got larger sums, and Goldman's senior executives made upward of $20 million. This is big money, even on Wall Street, but the partners stand to make a lot more in the coming months, probably as early as May or June, when the firm plans to convert itself into a public company by issuing stock on the New York Stock Exchange. The top Goldman managers would receive equity stakes worth more than $150 million each. Even junior partners will find themselves worth more than $15 million.

The most interesting thing about Goldman is not the money its partners make but the internal corporate culture that produces such wealth—a culture that mirrors the economic system it serves. Goldman is the avatar of twenty-first-century capitalism: global, risk-loving, meritocratic, creative, and efficient, but also secretive, inequitable, amoral, and relentless. It rewards teamwork over individualism, discretion over disclosure, and pragmatism over ideology. If international capitalism appears to be unstoppable, so does Goldman. The firm is expanding rapidly in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and anywhere else there is enough money to provide a potential market for men in dark suits toting Hewlett Packard 12C calculators. Last year, working out of twenty-three countries, its sixteen thousand employees underwrote a hundred and forty-three stock offerings and advised on three hundred and sixty-nine corporate mergers. All told, these mergers were worth $960 billion.

Just as is true of the hegemony of the free market, however, Goldman's future domination is not fully assured. There are signs that the firm's success is generating, as Marxists used to say, internal contradictions. Two months ago, Jon S. Corzine, Goldman's co-chief executive, resigned from that position, as the result of what some have called a "coup" by his fellow-co-chief executive, Henry



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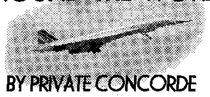

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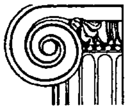

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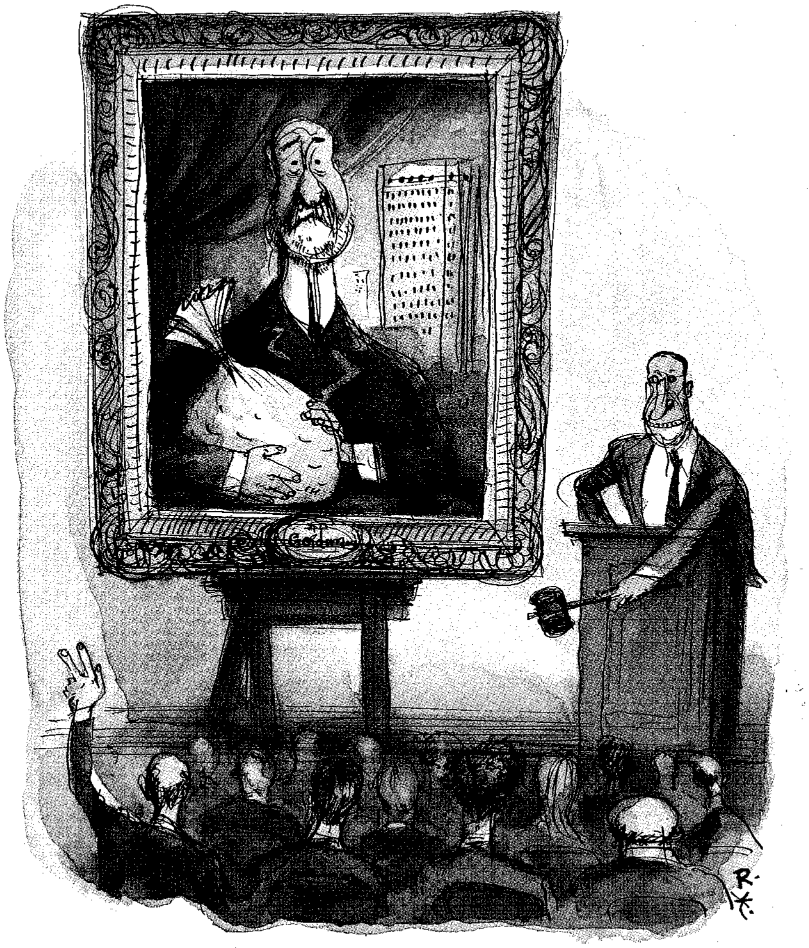
M. (Hank) Paulson, Jr., along with other senior partners on the firm's five-member executive committee. Stories emerged of Corzine, a Democrat, and Paulson, a Republican who once worked for John Ehrlichman in the Nixon White House, sniping at internal meetings and shouting at each other over the phone. For the first time that anybody could remember, Goldman appeared to have been stricken by the ills that have long afflicted rival investment banks: factionalism, ego, and avarice. Taken together with the decision to relinquish the partnership structure that made Goldman unique, Corzine's ouster was a stark reminder of the iconoclastic Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter's argument that free-market capitalism eventually undermines the very institutions that give rise to its success. This time, the institution being undermined was the most formidable investment bank on Wall Street.

The United States headquarters of Goldman, Sachs is an undistinguished modern building at 85 Broad Street, a couple of minutes' walk from the New York Stock Exchange. The first thing I noticed when I visited it one morning recently was that there was no name over the entrance or in the lobby. The only clue to Goldman's presence was a long line of town cars waiting outside. At a visitors' desk, I was given a guest pass that didn't mention Goldman, either. I rode the elevator to the top floor, where the partners' dining room is situated, and stepped out into standard investment-bank décor: dark panelling, imitation-Persian rugs, and bad pictures. A few floors below, hundreds of bond traders were doing what traders the world over do: staring at their computer screens and bellowing into their phones. Where I was, though, the atmosphere was so antiseptic and quiet that it reminded me of a waiting room in an expensive private hospital.

Over a lunch of grilled chicken and mineral water, I admired the view of New York Harbor and listened to John Rogers, Goldman's managing director responsible for corporate affairs, explain to me what I already knew from dealing with the firm on an irregular basis over the last twelve years: Goldman generally doesn't coöperate with reporters. Actually, "doesn't coöperate" is something of an understatement. Most Goldman employees would rather streak down Broadway than be quoted in the press. Even family members and close friends of Goldmanites tend to be struck mute when a reporter calls. "The likelihood of my deciding to talk to you is about equal to the likelihood of my horse winning the Cheltenham Gold Cup," Jonathan Miller, a British journalist whose wife is a Goldman managing director, told me.



Goldman, the avatar of twenty-first-century capitalism, is selling its heritage.

RICHARD THOMPSON

Marcus Goldman & Company opened for business on Pine Street in 1869. Its eponymous founder was a German Jew who had moved to America in the revolutionary year of 1848. Goldman was what was then known as a "note shaver": he bought I.O.U.s from local merchants and sold them to investors. In 1882, Goldman invited his son-in-law, Samuel Sachs, to join his company and changed its name. Goldman, Sachs managed its first big corporate deal in 1906: an initial stock offering by Sears, Roebuck.

In the late twenties, Goldman came under the inspired but mercurial direction of Waddill Catchings, a charismatic lawyer and writer on economics, who had grown up in Sewanee, Tennessee. Catchings was a born trader. He installed a stock ticker in the company's office and, in 1928, set up the Goldman, Sachs Trading Corporation—a pioneering investment trust, which borrowed gobs of money to buy stocks on behalf of its shareholders. By the beginning of October, 1929, shares in the new entity were changing hands for $326 each, and Catchings was widely seen as a business genius. A month later, the same shares were selling for $1.75, and the reputations of both Catchings and Goldman were in ruins.

From 1930 to 1969, Goldman was run by Sidney Weinberg, a five-foot-four Brooklyn elf who had worked his way up from a job as a porter's assistant. Weinberg avoided areas of business he saw as too risky, such as making bets with the partners' capital—an activity he referred to as shooting craps—or managing the public's money, and he refocussed the firm on advising major

"I got another callback. My agent says it's between me and the guy who's going to get it."

• •

corporations, forever stressing that if the firm won the trust of its clients it would prosper. Goldman has changed a lot since Weinberg's time, but the understated culture he created lives on at 85 Broad Street.

Investment banking, when you come down to it, is an information business. In any such industry, the key to success is getting talented people to work together and stay together. Goldman has accomplished this better than anybody else on Wall Street, and that is largely due to the firm's recruitment process, which involves everybody from junior analysts to senior partners. Each department is responsible for its own hiring, but the firm also designates "school teams" to target more than fifty schools, from Stanford to the University of North Carolina. Each team is led by "school captains." The co-captain of the Harvard team is Goldman's first and only black partner, Jide Zeitlin. The Mount Holyoke team is co-led by one of the firm's most senior women, Robin Neustein.

In a recent survey of M.B.A. students, Goldman was deemed the most desirable place to work in America. (It was followed by McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group, Bain & Company, and Microsoft.) As might be expected, it isn't easy to get in. Working in pairs, Goldman's recruiters talk to about forty students a day and invite a quarter of them back the following day for another round. Candidates who survive this grilling are invited to the firm's offices for a full day of interviews, culminating in a dinner with senior Goldman executives. Agile brains and near-perfect grades are necessary but not sufficient conditions for being hired. Just as important is fitting in. "They are interested in how you carry yourself," one Ivy League recruit told me. " 'Are you ready for boot camp? Are you a team player?' At Goldman, it is kind of frowned upon to stand out." A person familiar with Goldman's recruitment process confirmed that the firm "looks for people that don't need individual recognition in an unhealthy way." She listed brains, passion, and integrity as the other ingredients for a potential Goldmanite. "We are careful—we don't want ruggedly commercial people," she told me. "But it's not like we are cut from stencils." Perhaps not, but some Goldmanites take a peculiar pride in the image of themselves as an anonymous but fearsomely competitive set of drones. "We're like Penn State," one senior Goldman banker told me. "Simple uniforms, no insignia, no names, just a number."

The cult of teamwork is also stressed by Lisa Endlich, a former Goldman vice-president and foreign-exchange trader who has just published a sympathetic but informative history of the firm, "Goldman Sachs: The Culture of Success." The book offers many revealing anecdotes, including one related by Janet Tiebout Hanson, a family friend of John C. Whitehead, who was a co-chairman from 1976 to 1984. After graduating from Columbia Business School, Hanson got a job selling bonds for Goldman. At first, she sent Whitehead copies of all her transactions, which were pitiful by the firm's standards, and wrote on them, "I did this trade." For months, Whitehead ignored her missives. One day, he called and said, simply, "Janet, at Goldman, Sachs we say 'we.' We never say 'I.' "

AFTER a few weeks of orientation, new recruits set to work in small teams, each of which might consist of an analyst (a recent college recruit), an associate (a recent M.B.A.), a vice-president, and a partner. The junior members do the grunt work—deconstructing annual reports, analyzing financial forecasts, preparing company valuations—and they are expected to toil as long as it all takes. "I used to come in about nine in the morning, then go into meetings with analysts and other people at the firm all day," a person who joined Goldman out of college told me. "At about seven in the evening, I would go down to the gym and get something to eat. I would come back, have another meeting with my vice-president, then sit down in front of a spreadsheet. By that time, it might be nine or ten, but there were still lots of people there. You'd look around the floor at midnight, and it would be pretty full. Even at two or three in the morning, it would be pretty full."

One of the novelties of modern capitalism is that the people who work the longest hours are often the most highly educated and highly paid, while the poor and uneducated are often unemployed. In this, too, Goldman is emblematic: workaholism is the norm, and so is constant pressure to perform. Every person in the firm is continually assessed from three sides: by his bosses, by his subordinates, and by his peers. Nowadays, the

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process is carried out on the firm's internal computer network. Employees log on, enter a password, and pull up a file that contains a person's name with questions like "How are his technical skills?," "How are his interpersonal skills?," and "What are his over-all strengths and weaknesses?" Anybody whose performance doesn't match up to expectations is either reassigned or asked to move on. "We like to deal with these things before they go to the brink," a person familiar with the process told me. Associates, if they survive, tend to become vice-presidents after three or four years, and partners after another six or eight. Even partners must be reconfirmed every two years, and if their output sags they are quietly asked to step aside. By the age of fifty-five, all but a few partners have taken some money out of the firm and have retired—a process known as "going limited," since most retired partners stay on as limited partners.

Goldman's relentlessness usually pays off. Stephen Friedman, a former co-chairman of the firm, recounted to Endlich how, early in his career, a Texas oil-and-gas company—not a Goldman client—became the subject of a hostile-takeover offer. "We ran to the airport and flew to Dallas and they still didn't want to see us," Friedman recalled. "We camped out on their doorstep and then we got in and told them a few things that they hadn't thought through. But they said, 'We still don't want to hire you,' so we said, 'We'll be back tomorrow.' Every day we'd go to the Brooks Brothers near the office and buy another shirt, a pair of underwear, and a set of socks." Eventually, the oil company relented; Goldman was hired.

At most firms, loyalty is purchased in return for six-figure salaries and seven- or, occasionally, eight-figure bonuses. If the bonuses aren't big enough, star performers pack up and leave. The great strength of Goldman's partnership structure is that it encourages coöperation and loyalty. Staff turnover at the firm is the lowest on Wall Street—about three per cent a year. "The problem with Goldman, Sachs is that they have all taken the Kool-Aid," a senior executive at a rival firm told me. "It is very, very hard to get people to leave." Money isn't the only reason that people stay at Goldman. "People listen to you regardless of your pay grade," a Goldman managing director told me. "There is a real respect for the individual voice. Plus, there is the quality of the people. Wherever you look in Goldman, Sachs, there are high-quality people."

The downside of working for Goldman, of course, is that families, friends, and outside pursuits of any kind are neglected. After a few years there, even the broadest of minds tend to get narrower—a point that was brought home to me by a woman who recently went out to dinner with a senior Goldman banker. "He was a nice guy, very bright and articulate, but it was kind of a weird date," she said. When the discussion turned to movies or books, she said, "making conversation was pretty difficult." This isn't an isolated example. When Robert Rubin, a former co-chairman of Goldman, began his current job as Treasury Secretary, his new staff was surprised to discover that he didn't appear to know who Aretha Franklin was. Some Goldman partners are scarcely familiar with their children, let alone with soul singers. One partner I know used to take a taxi home every evening to put his kids to bed. The taxi would wait outside his house, then deposit him back at the office for three or four hours' more work.

In recent years, the firm has made efforts to be more hospitable to women. It has installed a day-care center in its New York office, and its recruitment policies are a far cry from some years back—when, according to Endlich, an interviewer asked female Stanford students whether they would advise a friend to have an abortion in order to further her career. Nonetheless, the firm's Stakhanovite cast of mind remains a problem for many women. "I just knew when I left that I would never go back there—no amount of money is worth giving up my life to that extent," a young woman who quit Goldman and is now planning to get married told me. "I had a very difficult time seeing how I could keep on there and have children."

BETWEEN 1976 and 1984, Goldman was run by "the two Johns"—John L. Weinberg, a son of Sidney, and John C. Whitehead, the son of a telephone lineman from Montclair, New Jersey.

CHORUS

The wet bamboo clacking in the night rain
crying in the darkness whimpering softly
as the hollow columns touch and slide
along each other swaying with the empty
air these are sounds from before there were voices
gestures older than grief from before there was
pain as we know it the impossibly tall
stems are reaching out groping and waving
before longing as we think of it or loss
as we are acquainted with it or feelings
able to recognize the syllables
that might be their own calling out to them
like names in the dark telling them nothing
about loss or about longing nothing
ever about all that has yet to answer

—W. S. Merwin

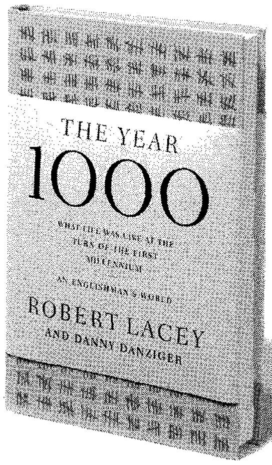
(Whitehead left to become a Deputy Secretary of State in 1984; Weinberg stayed on as chairman until 1990.) It was in this era that Goldman started to think and act globally. The firm has benefitted greatly from the extraordinary wave of international mergers that is transforming the business world. In the last twelve months, for example, the firm has acted as adviser to Daimler-Benz, when it purchased Chrysler in a $40-billion stock transaction; Vodafone, a British cellular telephone company, during its $66-billion takeover of AirTouch; and Deutsche Bank, during its $9-billion purchase of Bankers Trust. Last November, Goldman co-managed, with Japan's Nikko Securities, the biggest initial public offering yet: an $18-billion stock sale by N.T.T. DoCoMo, a Japanese cellular telephone company. "It's clearly coming down to a handful of financial firms around the world who can carry out these massive global deals," a senior Goldman partner told me. "It is a function of our teamwork that we've had such an impact in such a short period."

Nowhere has the firm's global strategy been more successful than in the City of London, Europe's financial center. Goldman is arguably London's leading investment bank, and the firm's recent history there is a case study of how the shock troops of globalization can shatter a comfortable but ossified local culture. Fifteen years ago, when I started reporting about the City, it was a fusty, class-ridden place, dominated by sclerotic, undercapitalized local firms, many of which were little more than sinecures for the dimmer members of the English aristocracy. The accepted practice was to put in a couple of hours' work at the office in the morning, take a long, liquid lunch, do a couple of more hours' work, then go home. On Fridays, you didn't bother with the afternoon part. Goldman began recruiting bright, working-class British graduates, who had been shunned by old-line City firms, and paired them up with gung-ho Yanks. It built a big new office on a Fleet Street site that had once housed the *Daily Telegraph*, and made enthusiastic pitches for all sorts of new business. Gradually, through a combination of astute acquisitions, technical know-how, and sheer hard work, it overtook its English rivals.

This triumph wasn't without moments of comedy. I recall having lunch at British merchant banks and being told that Goldman's brash methods would never work in London. Endlich describes an occasion when a group of Goldman and British bankers were dining with a client at the end of a long and arduous takeover battle. The Britishers were discussing what to do next. One said he was going to walk Hadrian's Wall; another was flying off to Mauritius. Eventually, the Goldmanites were asked about their plans. "Guys, it's two-thirty," one Goldman hand piped up. "Woolworth Holdings was raided by Dixons yesterday, and we've been

"There are absolutely no swear words or obscenities in Anglo-Saxon English...*fokkinge, crappe,* and *bugger* were all much later imports, probably coming from Holland."

WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE
IN THE YEAR 1000



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hired. We're doing a meeting at four o'clock. We'll see you later."

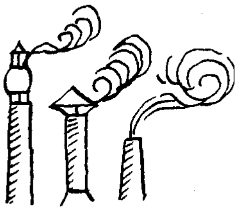
During the late eighties and early nineties, Goldman was run by two former lawyers: Stephen Friedman and Robert Rubin. (Rubin left in 1992 to join the Clinton Administration; Friedman stayed on as chairman until 1994.) Under their leadership, Goldman cast off any remaining commercial restraints imposed by the legacy of Sidney Weinberg, and embraced risk as the inevitable price of reward. In accepting this tradeoff, the firm was mimicking the economic decisions made by governments from Beijing to Brasília following the collapse of socialism. During the first six months of last year, almost half of Goldman's profits came from trading and investing in everything from stocks, bonds, currencies, futures, swaps, and options to exotic financial instruments like "asset-backed securities," "swaptions," and "inverse floaters." Most of the time, these trading strategies make money, but sometimes they don't. When the world financial markets shuddered last fall, Goldman suffered trading losses of more than $500 million.

Goldman rarely leads the way into new fields, but once a profitable niche has been established—by Salomon Brothers in bond arbitrage and mortgage-backed securities; by Drexel Burnham Lambert in junk bonds; by Kohlberg Kravis Roberts in leveraged buyouts—it usually heads for it. In recent years, the firm has also taken stakes in outside companies such as Ralph Lauren, A.M.F. Bowling, and Guangdong Enterprises, the last of which is a conglomerate set up by the Communist government of Guangdong Province, in southern China. The ghost of Waddill Catchings has been exorcised: Goldman, Sachs Asset Management now invests about $200 billion of other people's money, and the firm's private-banking division caters to almost half of the Forbes 400.

FREE-MARKET capitalism is the developed world's only thriving religion—in large part because it is a flexible creed, which allows for the jettisoning of old beliefs when they clash with currently profitable pursuits. Goldman's partners are good capitalists. Justly proud of their heritage, they are, nevertheless, usually willing to part with hallowed tradition rather than forgo a chance to make money. The firm used to avoid competing with its clients; now it does so occasionally, by investing its own money in deals. The firm used to avoid acting on behalf of the bidder in hostile takeovers; now it bends the rule if the attacker is a client. The firm used to shun the Wall Street star system, rewarding traders on the basis of Goldman's over-all earnings; now rainmakers are imported from rival shops, and they get a share of the profits they generate. "I hate to say this, because I was a partner for years," a disgruntled former partner told Endlich. "But there is one thing you have to understand about the partnership. Greed changed the firm."

In London a few years back, the firm hired Larry Becerra, a chain-smoking Chicago native with a taste for fast motorcycles and leggy women, as a currency trader. Becerra rode to work on a Harley, kept his jeans and cowboy boots on throughout the workday, and left the office when the markets were quiet. Near his desk he hung a big red flag that featured a life-size picture of a Native American. Nobody seemed to mind. During his first nine months at Goldman, Becerra racked up $58 million in profits. In his second year, he made the firm seventy million. By then, he had become a cult figure, with other traders mimicking his calls to "buy them till your hands bleed." Eventually, Becerra's luck changed. The markets turned against him, and he cost Goldman considerable money. At that point, according to some accounts, his bosses asked him to start wearing a suit and tie to work.

Goldman is fanatically protective of its reputation, but its regulatory record is not unblemished. In February of 1987, Robert Freeman, a senior partner who was accused of insider trading, was led out of the New York offices by a federal marshal. The firm vehemently denied the charges, but after three years of legal skirmishing Freeman confessed to one felony charge and served time in prison. Goldman's management committee expressed its "heartfelt sympathy" to his family. The firm was also involved in Britain's biggest financial scandal for many decades—the collapse of Robert Maxwell's media empire. In the months before November 5, 1991, when Maxwell dropped into the Atlantic Ocean, he diverted hundreds of millions of pounds from his employees' pension funds to his private companies. Many of these illicit transactions were carried out through Maxwell's broker at Goldman, Eric P. Sheinberg. Goldman never admitted to any wrongdoing, but four years later it paid $253 million to settle lawsuits from aggrieved pensioners.



The most stunning example of Goldman's amorality is, of course, the firm's decision to sell itself to outside shareholders at a stock-market peak. The idea of going public had been raised many times during the past three decades, but until last year Goldman's partners had repeatedly quashed it, on the grounds that (a) the firm wasn't really theirs to sell, since they were merely temporary occupiers of a great historical franchise, and (b) the partnership structure was central to the firm's unique culture.

When Jon Corzine, a rumpled and bearded native of Illinois, became Goldman's chairman, in 1994, he resurrected the notion of issuing stock, and again, in January of 1996, the Goldman partners said no. Corzine didn't give up. Last June, with the Dow at about nine thousand, he reassembled the partners and argued that going public was a good idea, for three reasons: it would allow the firm to motivate its workforce, by spreading its profits more widely; it would remove the danger of a liquidity crisis if a large number of partners decided to withdraw their money at the same time; and it would provide a currency—the new stock—that could be used to make acquisitions. This time around, the opposition to Corzine was strangely muted. By an overwhelming majority, the Goldman men (only eleven women were present) voted to approve a plan that will eventually dissolve their partnership after a hundred and thirty years.

To understand why this happened, it is helpful to turn again to Joseph Schumpeter. In his 1942 book "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy," Schumpeter claimed that entrepreneurial capitalism of the sort practiced at 85 Broad Street was doomed. "Capitalism creates a critical frame of mind which, after having destroyed the moral authority of so many other institutions, in the end turns against its own," he wrote.

In recent years, Wall Street has turned against the idea of freestanding investment banks. Between 1996 and 1998, Morgan Stanley merged with Dean Witter; Salomon Brothers merged with Smith Barney, and the combined firm then merged with Citicorp; Merrill Lynch bought Mercury Asset Management, a big British firm. Some people at Goldman came to see their independent status as out-of-date.

But that wasn't the dominant factor in the partners' turnaround. On Wall Street, the most inexorable force is money. "When an investment bank goes public, the incumbent owners of the firm reap an extraordinary windfall," Samuel Hayes, a professor of finance at Harvard Business School, told me. The point is best illustrated with some arithmetic. Given the high prices at which stocks in other investment banks are trading on Wall Street, Goldman's partners will probably receive about two and a half or three times the current value of their equity in a public offering. A Goldman executive who has been a partner for four or five years and built up, say, $20 million in his capital account could expect to get an equity stake worth between $50 million and $60 million. A senior partner who has already squirrelled away, say, $50 million in accumulated earnings could expect to pocket somewhere between $125 million and $150 million. "I don't find anyone who denies that the decision of many of the partners, particularly the younger men, was based more on the dazzling amounts to be deposited in their capital accounts than on what they felt would be good for the future of Goldman, Sachs," John Whitehead, now a limited partner, wrote to the firm in a letter obtained by *Fortune*. People outside the firm are equally skeptical about Corzine's arguments. Motivation has never been a problem at Goldman, they point out, nor has the firm ever had trouble attracting outside capital. (The Japanese bank Sumitomo owns about thirteen per cent of its equity.) As for the need to expand, Goldman has grown eightfold in the last two decades while retaining its partnership structure. "You can't tell me this isn't about money," a prominent Wall Street

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banker told me. "In this business, everything is about money."

The embarrassing publicity surrounding the decision to go public was nothing compared with the furor surrounding Corzine's demise. Not since Waddill Catchings was shown the door, in 1930, had a leader of the firm been forced from office. Corzine was allowed to stay on as non-executive chairman, but he was removed from the senior-management committee, and he is expected to leave for good after the stock offering. The incident was another demonstration of the difficulty that Goldman is having in coming to terms with its great success. Despite the decision to proceed with a public offering, the firm remains deeply ambivalent about changing its collegial culture.

"Jon saw himself more as the C.E.O. of a public company. The other members of the executive committee were more in tune with the partnership idea," a Goldmanite who is familiar with what happened told me. On one occasion, Corzine started merger talks with another firm, J. P. Morgan, although he hadn't received approval to do so from his fellow-partners. (The discussions came to nothing.) Last September, he infuriated some of his colleagues further by choosing to invest $300 million in the bailout of Long-Term Capital Management, the Greenwich-based hedge fund. Other senior Goldman partners believed that the fund should have been allowed to go bust. In early January, the other members of the executive committee—Hank Paulson, John Thornton, John Thain, and Robert Hurst—forced Corzine to step down.

The firm is now in the extraordinary position of having voted to get rid of its most distinctive feature—its partnership structure—and of being run by a chief executive, Paulson, who last year failed to endorse the idea of going public, and two chief operating officers, Thornton and Thain, who actively opposed it precisely because they thought that it would undermine Goldman's competitive advantage. All three insist they are now fully committed to the stock offering; indeed, they are determined to bring it forward. Most Wall Street analysts had expected Goldman to wait until the late summer, at least, before proceeding with the sale, but people close to the firm say that Paulson and his colleagues are eager to get it behind them quickly. It is likely to be announced later this month, when Goldman releases its results for the latest quarter. The firm will then have to file a registration statement with the Securities and Exchange Commission and wait at least six weeks before carrying out the sale. Goldman is expected to sell between ten and fifteen per cent of its equity, and the deal is likely to raise between $3 billion and $4 billion, making it one of the largest initial public offerings ever seen in this country.

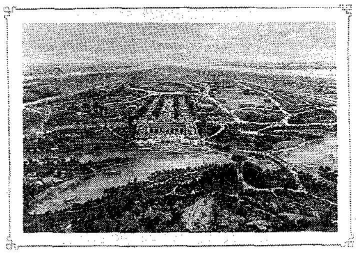
Assuming that the offering goes ahead—and only a precipitate slide in the stock market will stop it—a big slice of Wall Street history will disappear. Goldman's managers maintain that Corzine's departure and the coming stock sale will not have much impact on the firm's culture, or on its performance. "This whole place is designed so that nobody is irreplaceable," a senior Goldman banker told me. "The culture is designed so that the client chooses the firm and not one person."

Perhaps. It is certainly true that Goldman has a deep bench, but losing a chief executive is one thing; losing the firm's identity is another. Gus Levy, Goldman's chairman during the early seventies, memorably defined its business philosophy as "greedy, but long-term greedy." The partnership structure, which tied people to Goldman for decades and gave them a strong incentive to act in the long-term interest of the firm, was what made this philosophy viable. Once the partnerships are gone, Goldman people will be like everyone else on Wall Street—greedy, but short-term greedy—and the implications of this change are profound. Goldman will still be immensely powerful, but it will have sold its greatest asset, and it will be answerable to outside shareholders. The history of other ex-partnerships demonstrates that this can be an unhappy experience, and it often culminates in a firm's becoming part of a larger conglomerate. All told, it is hard to see Marcus Goldman's creation enduring for another hundred and thirty years. ◆

The court also said physicians have participated in executions for decades with no apparent harm to the doctor-patient relationship.
—*American Medical News.*

The patients, we think, would disagree.

AUCTIONS AT SWANN



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RUSSIA: THE KEY PLAYERS

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

WITH Boris Yeltsin growing increasingly frail, speculation has intensified over who will lead Russia into the next century. Herewith a guide to the personalities jockeying to assume control:

VIRIL VIRILLOVICH, forty-eight, retired tank commander.

Hard-liner. Nicknamed "The Implacable" when he ordered his tanks to level the Moscow McDonald's after discovering that he had been given a girl toy in his Contentiy Hamburgiy (Happy Meal). Advocates use of nuclear weapons as means of improving tax-collection procedures. Hobbies: listening to Joni Mitchell CDs; hunting wild boar; making interviewers nervous.

Quotable quote: "First we must hang the so-called reformers. Only then can we have true reform."

YEGOR ZUKZUKIN, fifty-four, leader of Gulag Party.

Has enjoyed surprising electoral success with platform of prison camps, slave labor, random beatings, throwing people out windows in the middle of the night, and eight-hour lines to buy rotten horse meat and mismatched Bulgarian sandals. Colorful speaker, mesmerizes crowds with command of tractor-output statistics from the Stalin era.

Quotable quote: "When you stop killing people in huge numbers, they get notions."

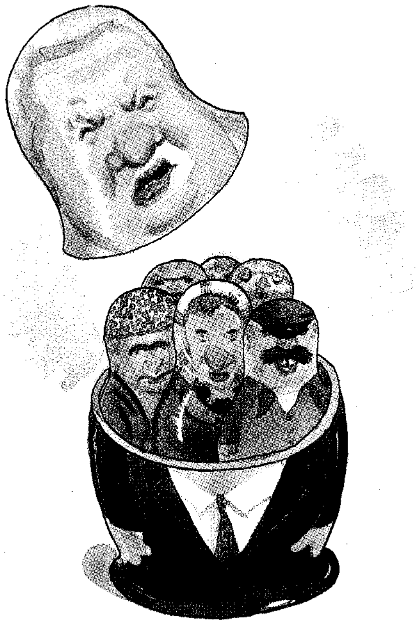
LUBYANKA TATIMOVNA, thirty-two, hostess.

Proprietress of the Lusty Duck, night club favored by members of the nomenklatura ruling élite. Statuesque, attractive, rumored to have caused Boris Yeltsin's last heart attack by encouraging him to arm-wrestle one of her bouncers. Came to public attention as regular guest on popular TV show "Our Lives Stink." Her campaign slogan, "Everyone must have more sex," appears to be catching on in the northern rural areas; also in the southern industrial areas; also in Siberia, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kamchatka, Cleveland.

Quotable quote: "You are having a good time? You look so good tonight! You have lost weight! So handsome!"

VADIM KUKARENKO, fifty-one, business tycoon.

Quick to recognize the economic opportunities following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he purchased the Russian nuclear-submarine fleet and resold it to Disney for as yet unspecified purposes. Later embroiled in controversy over scheme to sell bread to military made from used hockey pucks. With entourage of former Spetznaz (Special Forces) commandos and snipers, he is a presence at any negotiating table. Enjoys eating caviar off the breasts of Georgian prostitutes. Trademark: Hermès neckties with motifs of hundred-dollar bills and AK-47s. M.B.A., Harvard.



BARRY BLITT

Quotable quote: "Well, if you don't accept my terms, you are always free to leave. Yurgo here will show you to your car."

ANATOLY BLOT, forty-three, economist.

Strong advocate of free-market economy. Has come under attack for his controversial proposals, such as charging for food, housing, Hermès ties, and other basic needs. Once viewed as Yeltsin's "fair-haired boy," despite total baldness. Fell into disfavor when caught watering the President's vodka during a G7 summit meeting. Latest proposal to stave off hyperinflation: replace the ruble with Marlboro cigarettes.

Quotable quote: "If things continue at the present rate, I am, to be frank, contemplating moving to New Jersey."

BORIS KORKOV, sixty-two, former head of K.G.B.

Began career letting air out of dissident Andrei Sakharov's car tires. Came to attention of K.G.B. chairman and later General Secretary Yuri Andropov by proposing to surgically implant electronic listening device in every Soviet child at birth, saving enormous surveillance costs. Now a successful entrepreneur. Advises corporations how much to pay him not to pass all their secrets to the Taiwanese. Platform is straightforward: wants to make all important decisions on national defense, economic and foreign policy, production quotas, which models get to have sex with him.

Quotable quote: "Would it interest you to know where your wife was last night between six-thirty and eight-forty?"

LEB GLEMKIN, fifty-four, mayor of Chelyabinsk.

Known as "Mayor I Agree with You Two Hundred Per Cent!" after habit of telling everyone what they want to hear. Reported to have U.S. political consultants on his payroll. Currently promoting his "Contract with Russia." Notable provisions: electricity, drinkable water, more edible food, vacuum cleaners that don't explode; no taxes, less disease, universal wart removal. Could prove popular.

Quotable quote: "A chicken in every Kiev."

NICHOLAS III, seventy-nine, tsar (status pending).

Monarchist. Advocates shooting former and current Communists, turning over all land in Russia to him, making people bow before him, address him as "Baba."

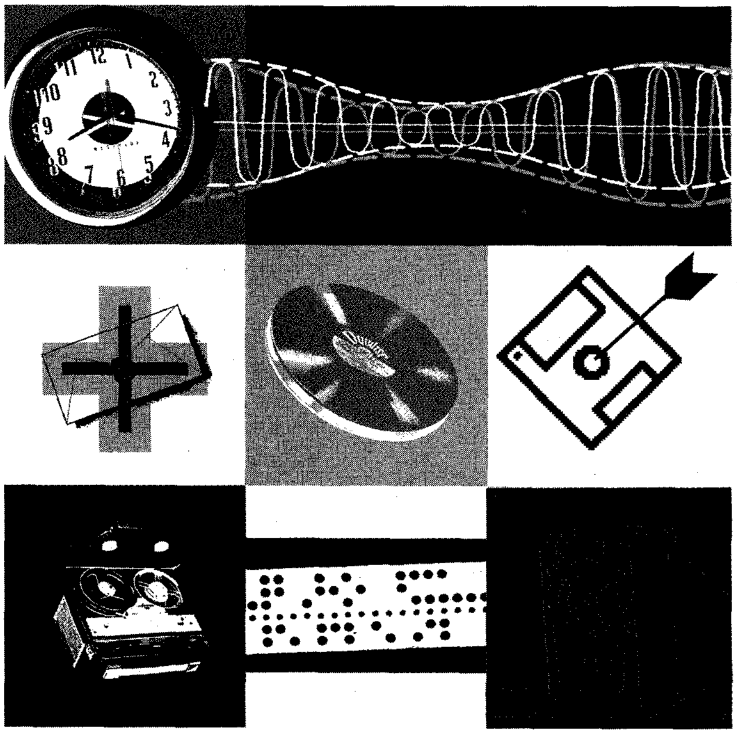
Quotable quote: "You may withdraw now. I am going to have my nap. Then I will have my tea." ◆

HIGH-TECH DEPT.

OVERLOAD

There's just no way to save all the information of the information age.

BY ALEXANDER STILLE

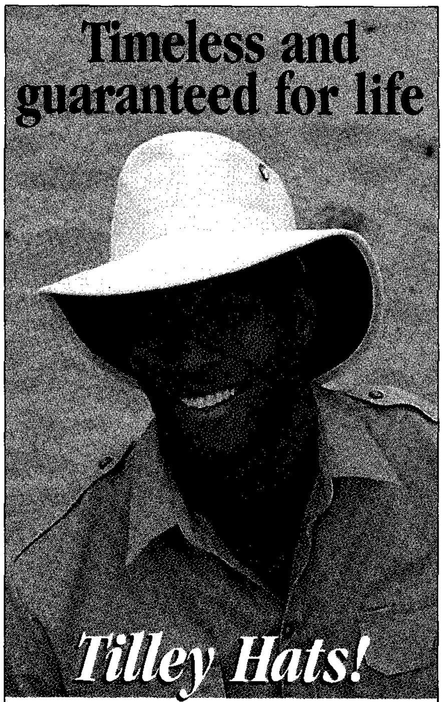


ANDY MARTIN

In a temperature-controlled laboratory in the bowels of the vast new National Archives Building, outside Washington—nearly two million square feet of futuristic steel-and-glass construction—an engineer cranks up an old Thomas A. Edison phonograph. A cylinder disk begins to turn, and from the phonograph's large metal horn we suddenly hear the scratchy oompah-pah of a marching band, striking up a tune at a Knights of Columbus parade in July of 1902. Nearby sits an ancestor of the modern reel-to-reel tape recorder: it's the very machine that recorded President Harry Truman's famous whistle-stop speeches as he travelled around the country by train in 1948 to win an extraordinary come-from-behind election victory. Instead of capturing sound on magnetic tape, the device stored its data on spools of thin steel wire as fine as fishline. Now some of the wire has rusted, and it occasionally snaps when it is played back through the machine.

This laboratory, in the Department of Special Media Preservation, is a kind of museum of obsolete technology, where Archives technicians try to tease information out of communications devices that vanished from circulation long ago. But the lab is more than a curious rag-and-bone shop of old gizmos; in many ways, it offers a cautionary vision of the future. The problem of technological obsolescence—of fading words and images locked in odd-looking, out-of-date equipment—is an even bigger problem for the computer age than it was for the media produced in the first half of the century.

One of the great ironies of the information age is that, while the late twentieth century will undoubtedly record more data than have been recorded at any other time in history, it will also almost certainly lose more information than has been lost in any previous era. A study done in 1996 by the Archives concluded that at current staff levels it would take approximately a hundred and twenty years to transfer the backlog



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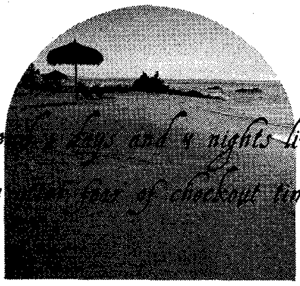

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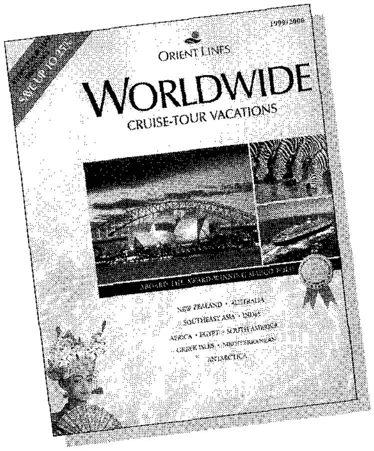

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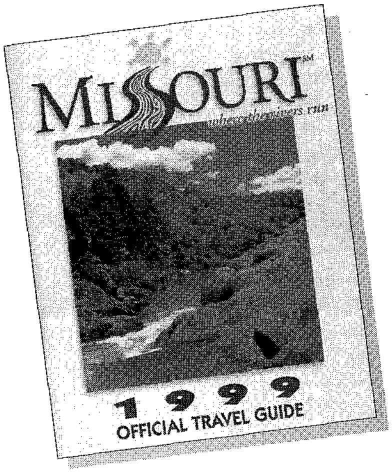

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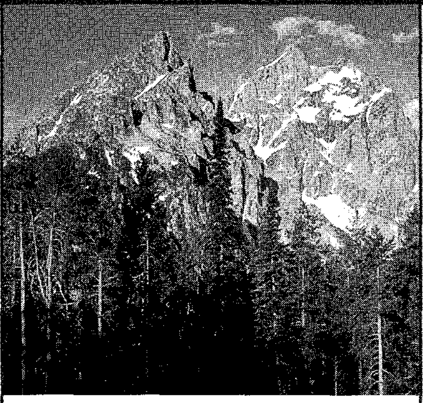

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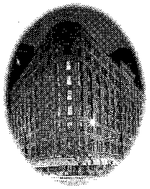

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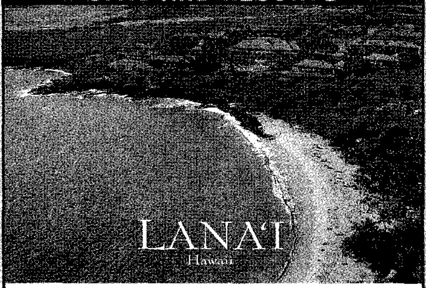

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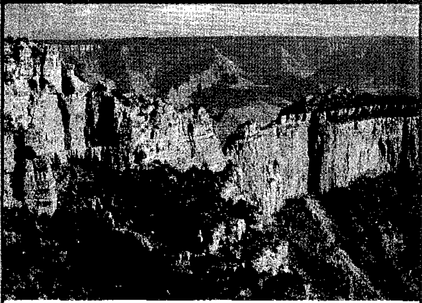

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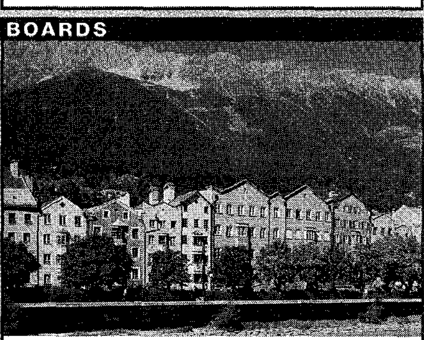

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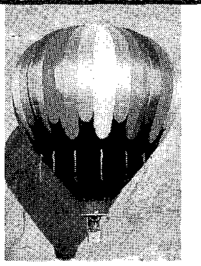

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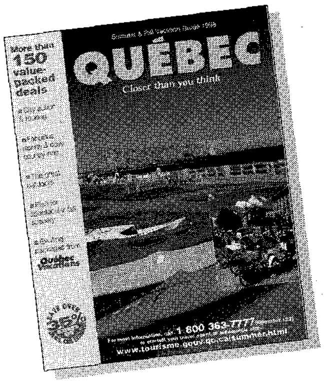

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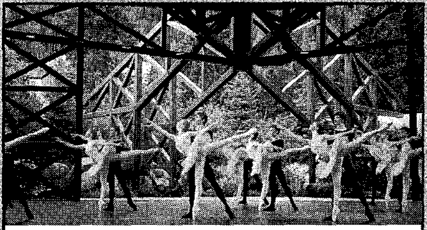

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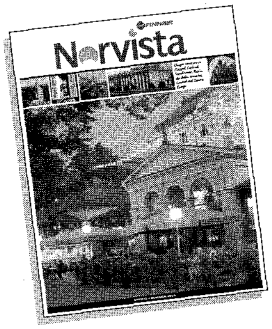

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of nontextual material (photographs, videos, film, audiotape, and microfilm) onto a more stable format. "And in quite a few cases we're talking about media that are expected to last about twenty years," Charles Mayn, the head of the laboratory, says. Decisions about what to keep and what to discard may be made by default, as large portions of the archive simply deteriorate beyond the point of viability.

Mayn is a tall, thin man with gray hair, a gentle manner, and the neat, understated dress of a computer engineer of the nineteen-fifties—the time of his youth. A self-described "science weenie," he is uncomfortable talking about himself and plays down his own considerable ingenuity in rebuilding many of the old machines with the help of modern parts in order to get them to play back intelligible sounds and images. His particular laboratory is dedicated to "dynamic media"—things with moving components, such as movie cameras and audio and video players. In his spare time, Mayn has been known to scour junk shops and yard sales in the Washington area, looking for old Dictabelts or movie projectors.

A short distance down the laboratory workbench from the Edison phonograph are some eighteen-inch acetate disks, precursors of the long-playing vinyl record. The United States Army used them to record enemy radio broadcasts throughout the Second World War. They play on a machine called a Memovox, which has a turntable that changes speed as the record plays, slowing down to compensate for the quicker rotation of the disk as the stylus approaches the center. It was an ingenious invention, but it didn't catch on, perhaps because it required rather complex internal machinery. A glass disk, used on yet another recording device, marked "Germany, October 24, 1941, 11:55 P.M.," lies shattered on the turntable. "Luckily, the glass generally breaks in fairly clean pieces, so we are often able to put them back together," Mayn explains. The Archives has some seventy thousand of these military recordings, each of which has a playing time of up to two hours. It would take a researcher who worked without interruption for eight hours a day approximately forty-eight years to listen to this collection in its entirety. "A lot of the disks may contain a lot of nothing—airwave noise, shortwave whistles—but you may have to listen to the whole thing to figure that out," Mayn says.

On one wall are the internal organs of a film projector from the nineteen-thirties. The old heads have been mounted to play with modern reels. "Twenty-eight different kinds of movie soundtracking systems were devised during the thirties and forties in an effort to improve the quality of sound," Mayn explains. "Most of them are incompatible." This particular model used something called "push-pull" technology, in which the sound signal was split onto two different tracks. The technology was meant to cancel noise distortion, but the two tracks must play in near-perfect synchrony. "If it is played back properly, it is better than a standard optical track, but if it is played back even a little bit improperly it is far, far worse," Mayn says. About fifteen years ago, he was actually able to use this reconfigured projector to show several reels of push-pull film from the Nuremberg trials, and the lab has transferred some eighteen hundred reels of push-pull tape onto new negatives.

Potentially, the information age appears to offer the historian a Holy Grail of infinite memory and of instant, permanent access to virtually limitless amounts of information. But as the pace of technological change increases so does the speed at which each new generation of equipment supplants the last. "Right now, the half-life of most computer technology is between three and five years," explains Steve Puglia, a preservation and imaging specialist, whose laboratory is just down the hall from Mayn's. In the nineteen-eighties, the Archives transferred some two hundred thousand documents and images onto optical disks—the cutting edge of new technology at the time. "I'm not sure we can still play them," Puglia says, because they depend on computer software and hardware that are no longer on the market.

There also appears to be a direct relationship between the newness of a technology and its fragility. Paul Conway, a librarian at Yale University, has created a graph going back to ancient Mesopotamia which shows that, while the quantity of information being saved has increased exponentially, the durability of media has decreased almost as rapidly. The clay tablets that record the laws of ancient Sumer are still on display in museums around the world, and many medieval illuminated manuscripts written on animal parchment still look as if they were painted or copied yesterday, whereas modern books printed on acidic paper as recently as the nineteen-eighties are already turning to dust. Black-and-white photographs will last a couple of centuries, but most color photographs become "unstable" within thirty or forty years. Videotapes deteriorate much more quickly than traditional movie film does—they last about twenty years. And the latest generation of digital storage tape is considered to be safe for only ten years.

Digital technology, which is based on incredibly precise mathematical coding, either works perfectly or doesn't work at all. "If you go beyond the limits of the error rate, the screen goes black and the audio goes to nothing," Mayn says, "and up to that point you haven't realized there were any errors. Analog technology"—used on vinyl records and on electromagnetic tapes—"deteriorates more gracefully." The old wax cylinders of the original Edison phonograph sound faded and scratchy, but they are still audible. Mayn picks up a tiny plastic digital audiotape that fits neatly in the palm of his hand. "People love these things because they are so small, compact, and lightweight, and can store tons of data, but as larger and larger amounts of data are crammed into smaller and smaller spaces the technology gets more precise, more complex, and therefore more fragile. We have a lot of these tapes from the late nineteen-eighties that can't be played at all."

THE National Archives and Records Administration, or NARA, was established during the nineteen-thirties, on the optimistic premise that the government could keep all its most vital records indefinitely, and thus act as our nation's collective memory. Now, as the agency drowns in data and chokes on paper, it is facing the stark realization that it may not be able to preserve what it already has, let alone keep up with the incessant flow of information coming its way.

The numbers are so huge as to be almost comical. The Archives is currently the custodian of four billion pieces of paper; 9.4 million photographs; 338,029 films and videos; 2,648,918 maps and charts; nearly three million architectural and engineering plans; and more than nine million aerial photographs. Storage consumes nearly half of the agency's budget, so, ironically, the more information it keeps the less money it has to spend on making this information available to the public. Because other government agencies are generally not required to hand over their records for permanent storage until thirty years after their creation, the Archives has only recently begun to grapple with the extraordinary explosion of information produced during recent decades.

Space has been a problem at NARA since before it opened, on November 8, 1935, in a grand neoclassical building on Pennsylvania Avenue, down the street from the White House. That building was designed to have a handsome internal courtyard, but the nation's first archivist had the space filled in to accommodate more stacks. These, too, quickly proved inadequate, so the original seven stories of high-ceilinged rooms were chopped into thirds, creating twenty-one short floors of stacks. Any researcher who is more than six feet tall thus risks a concussion navigating this warren of seemingly identical corridors and shelves. Six rows of shelves on a single floor hold all the documents generated by the United States Supreme Court in its first hundred and forty years of life, while it takes the rest of that floor—the equivalent of about half a city block—to house the Court's papers from the last sixty years.

By 1993, the Archives had outgrown its original home and a new headquarters was built in College Park, Maryland. Although it is the third-largest government building, half the size of the Pentagon, Archives II, which opened in 1994, is already approaching the limits of its storage capacity. Despite predictions made some twenty years ago about the "paperless" office, most government agencies are still printing out their computer files and producing more paper than ever. Each year, on the average, the Archives receives about one and a half million cubic feet of new records, of which about a third are stored. At this rate, the space for paper records at Archives II is expected to run out by 2007.

In theory, computer technology should be more helpful in the storage of text than it is in storing the audio and video records of Mayn's dynamic media lab. So far, however, computers have only compounded the problem. In 1989, a public-interest group trying to obtain information on the Iran-Contra scandal successfully sued the White House to prevent it from destroying any electronic records. The result is that all federal agencies must now preserve computer files and electronic mail. But it took the Archives two and a half years (and its entire electronic-records staff) just to copy the electronic records of the Reagan White House, and "they are gibberish as they currently stand," says Fynette Eaton, who worked at the Archives' electronic-records center before moving over to the Smithsonian Institution.

The problem is that the multitude of departments, agencies, and offices that constitute the federal government use different computers and software programs—many of them old and obsolete. Many of the records from the Vietnam War era are stored in a database-management system (known as NIPS) that I.B.M. no longer supports, and which the Archives has difficulty translating into readable form. The Agent Orange Task Force, for example, has been unable to use herbicide records written in the NIPS format.

For several years, a disturbing rumor has circulated that the data from the United States census of 1960 were lost. According to the story, the information exists only on obsolete thirty-nine-year-old computer tapes, which can no longer be read. The Archives has reassured the public that the material has been safely copied onto more modern media, but, because census data are kept confidential until seventy-two years after their collection, the rumor will probably persist until 2032, when the data are made available to researchers. Meanwhile, later census surveys are still at risk. A few years ago, the Archives informed Congress that the Bureau of Census "reported to us . . . that they have over 4,000 reels of tape, containing permanently valuable data, which are difficult, if not impossible to use because they are in CENIO"—Census Input/Output—"format or because the files have been compressed on an ad hoc basis."

Because of the problems posed by outdated computers and software, the Archives issued an order in 1995 that government agencies were free to print out their E-mail for permanent storage. But Scott Armstrong, a journalist, who helped bring the initial White House E-mail suit, has protested that direc-

"He refuses to let me get on with the grieving process."

tive. "It makes no sense," he says. "If your basement were flooded, the first thing you would try to do is turn off the flow of water, and then start worrying about mopping up. The Archives is doing the exact opposite. It is already drowning in paper, but it is still telling people to print out their records onto paper. If the government had dedicated the energy it has spent fighting the E-mail lawsuits into modernizing its record-keeping operations, it would have gone a long way toward solving its problems." Under court order, NARA is formulating a new directive, to be announced next month.

ALTHOUGH it may be true that "the era of big government is over," as President Clinton has said, the era of big-government data banks is just beginning. Ken Thibodeau, the director of electronic-records programs at the Archives, maintains that Armstrong and others disregard the immense technological difficulties in trying to recover E-mail from thousands of different computers. Between 1989 and 1996, the Electronic Records Division took in twenty-five thousand new records. Then the E-mail from the Reagan-Bush White House, delivered four years after the fact, suddenly buried it in an avalanche of two hundred thousand electronic files, just as the State Department prepared to hand over a million two hundred and fifty thousand electronically stored diplomatic cables. Since then, the State Department has been averaging about a million messages a year. Meanwhile, President Clinton's office is pumping out E-mail at the rate of more than six million files a year.

This kind of volume could crash the Archives computer system. "We designed a system to handle maybe ten thousand messages a year," Thibodeau says. "You cannot scale up our system to deal with a million messages a year." The problem is that most E-mail programs were not written with long-term storage in mind. So, in the current state of technology, the Archives computers must treat each individual E-mail message as a separate file, which has to be opened and closed in order to be copied from one tape to another.

Thibodeau says the Electronic Records Division was looking at new, sophisticated storage devices coming onto the market, but that these presented problems of their own. "There's a kind of tape that can hold two hundred times the volume of the plastic cartridge we use," he says. "So it would be great in terms of space. But, as we've been talking to people who use this technology, we haven't talked to anyone who has successfully taken the tape out of the silo and read it on a different machine." The extreme precision of the new miniaturization technologies is such that each machine produces tapes that are unintentionally customized to a particular alignment of the laser beams that encode and read information. "A slight misalignment of the head is sufficient to guarantee that you will never read the tape except on a machine that has the same misalignment," Thibodeau points out. Because of this difficulty, the Archives has turned to the San Diego Supercomputer Center to find a new solution that is not yet on the market.

Ironically, the downsizing of government has actually magnified the information crisis. "When a government agency downsizes, usually the first thing it does is get rid of the record-keepers and clean out the storage closet," Mayn says. "We suddenly get a call telling us to pick up a trailer-size truckload of records." When the Pentagon closed Norton Air Force Base, for instance, it decided to turn over its huge motion-picture-storage warehouse to the Archives, thus doubling in a single stroke the Archives' video holdings. At the same time, the Archives has to do more with fewer resources. The budget of the Electronic Records Division fell by about fifteen per cent and its personnel was cut by ten per cent during a period when the volume of new data has increased tenfold. Since 1996, the budget has almost doubled, though the workload stands to increase a thousandfold.

The problem, in Mayn's view, is that nobody inside or outside government is making the tough decisions about what to store and what to throw away. "I'm not a historian, but, personally, I have my doubts about some of the stuff we're trying to keep," he says. "Do we really need dozens of different films on the workings of the M1 tank? I can see keeping a few as a sample, but I'm not sure we need the entire collection." At the height of the Vietnam War, the Pentagon routinely sent hundreds of men with cameras out into the jungle to film the combat. "Each of these people was told to shoot hundreds or thousands of feet of film," Mayn says. While much of this film is of genuine historical interest, the total quantity would take one technician several lifetimes to copy. Mayn believes that, because much of this material will eventually deteriorate, the choice of what to keep will be made by default. "We will keep those things that researchers happen to have requested and that consequently get copied onto new media," he says.

In the end, the sorting out of the information explosion may repeat the process that determined which books we now possess from antiquity. The works of authors such as Homer and Virgil survived intact because of their enduring popularity and the multiple copies that were therefore made at different times. But many of the works that we regard as "fixtures" of our culture (including Plato) were lost for several centuries and are known to us only because one or two copies turned up in medieval monasteries or in the collections of Arab scholars. Undoubtedly, a good many great works did not survive at all: Sophocles is known to have written more than a hundred and twenty plays, of which we have only seven.

The danger now is not that some modern Sophocles will be totally lost in the databases of the Department of Agriculture or of the Census Bureau but, rather, that such a vast accumulation of records makes it nearly impossible to distinguish the essential from the ephemeral. The Archives of the future may resemble "The Library of Babel," which Jorge Luis Borges imagined nearly sixty years ago—an infinite library that contained every conceivable book in the universe. There were books that consisted solely of the repetition of a single letter of the alphabet, and others in which all the pages except one were blank; the discovery of an intelligible sentence was cause for jubilation. Eventually, after many centuries, the librarians of Babel were driven to despair in their unfulfilled quest to find a coherent, complete book. ♦

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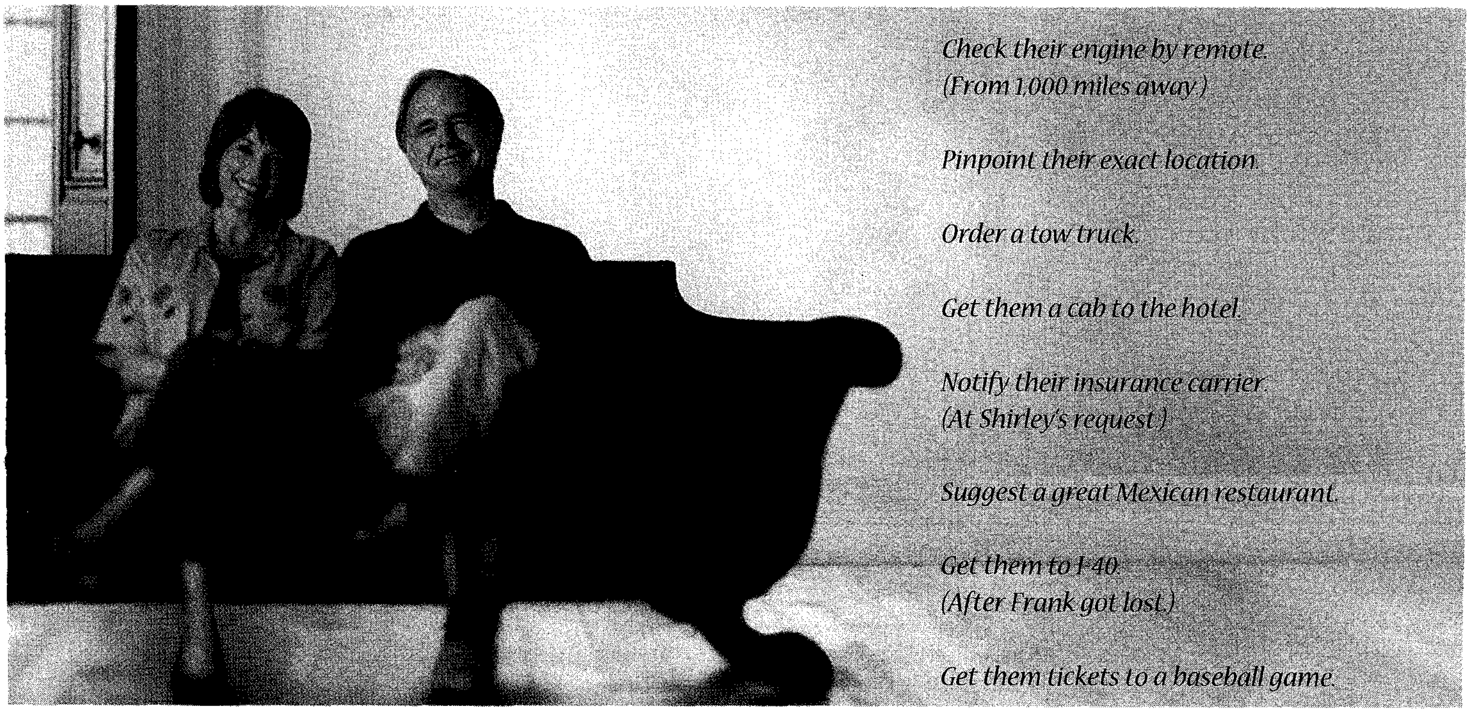

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PERSONAL HISTORY

GOOD LOSERS

Gambling began as a diversion from the quiet of a college town, but it led to a kind of trouble the authors never expected.

BY FREDERICK AND STEVEN BARTHELME

Rick, left, and Steve. They swagger, they lope. It's jokes and jitters. Everything is still possible. Photograph by Steve Lehman.

RICK telephones Steve at midnight Wednesday. Rick has finished classes for the week. Steve has a class Thursday, but it's a night class. Rick says, "So, let's roll. I want to be back by six in the morning."

"No chance of that," Steve says. "You driving?"

"Yeah. Let me call Mary."

Steve hangs up the phone, asks his wife, Melanie, if she wants to go. She doesn't. It's a routine. Rick phones Steve at midnight; Steve asks Melanie if she wants to go; she never does.

Rick and Steve are brothers, college professors and writers, who since 1995 have been doing all-night blackjack sessions at the Mississippi-coast casinos. At first, they played on paychecks, tiny savings accounts, credit-card advances; later, they used money from their parents' estate. They've been gambling at a frenetic pace at "the boats," as the locals call them, and, without knowing it, they're heading for a fall.

Steve changes into a heavy shirt with

flaps over the pockets—it's cold in the casino, and the pocket flaps hide the hundred-dollar bills he always ends up carrying. He puts his credit cards in a neat stack on the table in the kitchen. "Call me when you get down there," his wife says.

Across town, Rick imagines how his girlfriend, Rie, will react to another midnight trip to the coast. If he wins, he's discovered, she tends to hate it less.

Rie lives in another house, with her daughter and their two dogs. She doesn't like the gambling and she doesn't want Rick gambling. But after months of argument she has given up. "It's your money," she says. "Throw it away if you want to." He can't call her now, because she's asleep.

He picks up the phone and calls his friend Mary Robison, a gambling buddy and a colleague at the university.

"We're thinking of going to the coast," he says.

"We shouldn't," she says.

"Yeah, I know," he says. "But we are. I'm calling Steve back. We're leaving right away. You going?"

"I'll take my car," she says. "I like to drive."

Rick and Steve and Mary stop at an Exxon station for gas and Cokes and then head out onto Highway 49 and into the darkness. They make a short parade—Rick's car, Mary's car.

The night is clear, and once they're out of town they can see stars in between rows of pines, the north-south lanes of the highway separated by trees that are a hundred years old. On either side, more pines. At first, the conversation in Rick's car is sparse. There are remarks about students, an M.A. thesis, a person in a workshop. Rick mentions a particularly fine story by one of the graduate students.

They sit in silence for a few minutes, enjoying the sound of the car.

Darkness. The pines. Then Steve says, "What did you lose last week?"

"Twenty-four hundred," Rick says.

"After everything?"

"Yeah, twenty-four. I was up a thousand, lost it on a couple of hands. If I could just keep from chucking all my money out onto the table."

"That'd be good," Steve says. "On the other hand, sometimes you win."

"True," Rick says.

"When I hit one of the slots for a grand or two right away, I'm usually good for the whole night," Steve says.

"How often has that happened?"

"Frequently. It's a regular event."

"Oh, really?" Rick says. He's watching the rearview, keeping an eye on Mary. "How frequently?"

"About twice," Steve says. "Two times," he adds, for clarification.

There are a lot of trucks on the highway. They all seem to be new trucks, white and clean, tall, and they roar when they go by. Rick says, "I'm keeping it to twenty-five hundred. If I get down twenty-five hundred, I'm leaving. Mary can take me home."

They drive in silence. A good moment. Alone and yet together, and the night seems very big. It goes on for miles. The land is low rolling country, and all they see is the trees alongside the highway and an occasional roadside stand. They pass through Wiggins, about thirty miles south of Hattiesburg. They pass Perkinston, a junior college. They pass a pine-milling operation, acres of it right by the highway, where the trunks of pine trees, forty feet in length, are turned into two-by-fours.

They pass a Bible store—"Thousands of Bibles in Stock!"—and cruise through the little all-night town by the bend in the highway—one building, a small white store with two restaurants, and a state trooper's car. Steve's got his eyes shut. Rick sets the cruise control at seventy-two, seven miles over the limit.

When they reach the highway sign that says twelve miles to I-10 and fourteen to Gulfport, Steve calls his wife. "We're at the twelve-fourteen sign. We'll be there shortly." This is more of the routine.

At the casino, they pull into the garage, tuck the car in for the night. The walk from the garage to the casino is all nerves—like the walk from locker room to football field. They swagger, they lope. It's jokes and jitters. They imagine stacks of chips. Everything is still possible.

"Start slow," Steve says, cautioning Rick against his tendency to jump the bet early.

"Yeah, yeah. I know," Rick says.

Mary says, "I can't afford to lose a penny. I've got forty dollars here and I can't afford to lose a penny." She's tough, tall, good-looking but deadly thin. In her black clothes, she looks like scaffolding.

"You've only got forty dollars?" Rick says.

"That's all I've got in my pocket," she says, pretending this is an important distinction. "I've got my cards. But I can't lose a penny."

Mary often says things because she loves the way they sound. She loves the word "penny."

The casino appears to float atop sloppy green water you wouldn't want to fall into. Huge concrete piers anchor the "boat." The idea is that the casinos can't be on Mississippi land, so the owners have dug out pits on the beachfront, flooded them, and floated these barge-casinos there, literally feet off the beach. They cross the carpet-covered metal gangplank, nod at the white-shirted security guy there with his chrome clicker. Three clicks and they're counted. Then it's only the doors between them and the air-conditioning and the noise and the screeching players and the ingratiating dealers and the thick wine-red swirled carpet and the floating scent of a thousand people smoking. It's at this point things change.

Steve swears it's the air-conditioning. As soon as it hits you, he says, you're gone. They open the doors, and they're washed with treated air, the din, the scent of money, liquor, smoke. Adrenaline and aftershave. They're keyed up now, giddy, hopeful. They walk with a sure step. Something is suddenly clear, precise, desired.

Almost as soon as they're inside, they split up, lose sight of each other. It's two in the morning, and there are plenty of people gambling. People who, after a time, blur together, along with the wins and the losses, as they do in this story, in which long nights have been compressed into one and names have been changed.

Steve gets four hundred on a credit card to go with six in cash he has brought with him. He remembers when he first started gambling, how he laughed at the A.T.M. machines in the casino, how he promised himself never to use an A.T.M. there. He remembers thinking, That's death. He sits down at a one-dollar video-poker machine. Playing dollars is a sort of therapy, to get his bearings. After ten or fifteen minutes, he'll try some five- and ten-dollar slots, in the hope of hitting an early score to set up the night. Then, win or lose, he'll move on to blackjack.

Rick checks the chip racks of all the blackjack dealers—looking for a depleted one, which might mean the dealer has paid out heavy. He knows most of the dealers. He says hello, waves, smiles. They seem glad to see him.

At the casinos, chips come color-coded. White is a dollar, red five, green twenty-five, black a hundred, purple five hundred, orange a thousand. Rick drops a green chip, a "quarter," in the last betting circle on Roxie's table. Roxie's short, about forty-five. He's played with her before and won. She pats the felt in front of him and says good luck, as most dealers do when you start with them.

Rick goes through half his hundreds in no time at all, then breaks a couple of hundred down into greens and some reds. He bets two of those and continues playing.

Roxie makes a big deal out of the shuffle. She's dealing two-deck pitch, which means she's got two decks of cards mixed together, and deals out of her hand instead of a plastic "shoe."

People come and go, playing a little bit, leaving. After an hour, Rick is down seven hundred dollars. Steve walks up, raises his eyebrows to ask, "How're you doing?" Rick shakes his head, raises his eyebrows in return. Steve makes a thumbs-up sign and then a little-bit sign, using his thumb and forefinger.

He taps Rick's shoulder. "Why don't you try another table?"

"Soon as I lose the rest of this," Rick says.

Mary appears with a bucketful of dollar tokens, the fake coins from the slot machines. You have to change them at the cashier's cage in order to get real money. She sits in the chair next to Rick and asks how he's doing.

"Not so well," he says.

She rattles her cup of coins nervously and nods, lights a cigarette. Casinos are smokers' last refuge. She wants to get away but doesn't want to leave too suddenly. She fears that Rick will think she's a jinx. If you're playing blackjack, especially when it's going particularly well or badly, every blip in the environment thrives with meaning. You think Alanis Morissette on the sound system is a jinx, that the number of ice cubes in your glass brings bad luck.

Mary stubs out her cigarette, watches the end of another hand, which Rick loses, then points off in the direction of the slot machines.

"I'm going over here," she says.

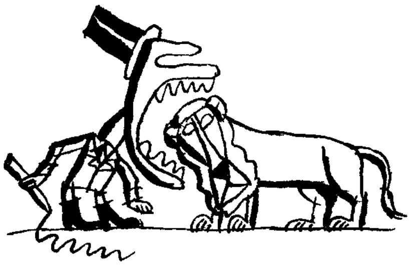
A couple of pit people lean on the side of the table. Rick's known to them. They've heard that he's writing a gambling novel, and they want to know what he's going to write about them. He tells them he'll say they were kind and they dealt him winners. They laugh at that.

After another half hour, Rick's finished with the thousand and has to go back to the cage. This time, he gets fifteen hundred on a credit card. He takes the cash to the table. He sits for a minute and then says to Roxie, "I think I'll do the salon."

She smiles. "I would. Stay away from me. I'm too hot."

The salon is at the far side of the casino, behind frosted Art Deco glass. There are tables with twenty-five-dollar minimums; two have fifty-dollar minimums. Once in a while, the minimum bet can be as high as five hundred dollars. The tables in the salon have fewer seats, and players are treated with particular care.

A Chinese guy with what looks like ten thousand dollars in a chip carrier is playing at a table by himself. Rick sits down at a table with a dealer named Lollie, who has two players, one with only three hundred dollars and the other with about five thousand. Rick waits until after the next shuffle—it's etiquette—and puts out his quarter, starting slow. Lollie is very friendly with the guy who has the five thousand. It's like they're old buds. He has a powerful smell about him—he wears too much cologne—and a heavy beard and mustache. He's smoking, drinking some kind of highball. The two of them are talking about a boating party.



The cards come and go, and pretty soon Rick has won a little something. He bumps his bet up to fifty dollars and wins, increases it to a hundred and then two hundred. In no time, he's got twenty-five hundred dollars and is even for the night. The cards are right at Lollie's table. She's busting a lot, much more than usual. The guy with five thousand is cleaning up as well. The guy with the three hundred is just about gone, and when he finally leaves the table Rick thinks about taking his place and playing two spots. He waits to see if the guy with the five thousand wants it, and when he doesn't Rick starts playing a second spot. This new hand would have been the loser's, so he goes there with the short money, just in case.

A small woman with rugged skin steps up to him out of the pit, writing his name on a card, asking him how much he brought to the table.

"Fifteen hundred," he says.

"You didn't buy it here?" she says.

"The cage," he says.

After a couple of quick hands, the guy with the five thousand is up to eight thousand. He's playing first base—the first position dealt to, immediately to the dealer's left. Rick is playing third base, the dealer's extreme right. The short hand is between them. Rick bets a quarter on that hand and two hundred and fifty on third base. The cards come out. He gets two face cards on his big hand, a thirteen on his little hand. He hits the thirteen, gets a seven, for twenty, stands on both hands. The dealer flips and has seventeen. Rick continues to play this way, shorting the middle hand but winning anyway, and pretty soon he's up to four thousand.

It's now a quarter to four in the morning. Steve appears and sits at the table, between Rick and the other guy.

"I've been playing two hands. Works fine."

"O.K. if I play one?" Steve says.

"Don't care," Rick says.

Steve drops a quarter where Rick was playing his short hand. The cards come out—he wins. Rick wins. The next hand is dealt. They both win again. And again. They play on like this until Lollie's replaced by a gangly kid who says he's a graduate student in chemistry. The big-money guy leaves. By

"I can't decide whether to specialize in criminal law or legal punditry."

four-thirty Rick has fifty-five hundred dollars. Steve has won about fifteen hundred dollars, but he's still down for the night.

Rick colors up his chips, getting ready to leave the table.

Steve continues playing fifty to a hundred a hand, occasionally two hundred. Separately, two Vietnamese women join the table, one small and sharply dressed, the other big and square-shouldered. The small one doesn't like the way the other one plays her cards. She does a running critique, out loud. The bigger woman's play is slightly irregular; she splits fours against a four, a bad play by the book, and she hears about it. She's getting angrier and angrier, muttering about all the advice. Now the opinionated one, who looks like a fashion model, turns to Steve and says, "What do you think?"

What Steve thinks is that their argument is distracting. He'd rather she hadn't invited him into it. He says, watching the dealer's hand, without looking at either woman, "Maybe we should play our own cards?"

He's within sight of even. He has got close three times, and each time lost again. Losing everything trying to get the last hundred is familiar, but he's still four down and can't quit. At the next shuffle, he says, "Could you hold two spots?" The dealer puts out two clear plastic circles—"lammers"—reserving his places.

Steve wanders over to the high-ticket slots and runs into Roylynn, a waitress he knows—a little worn out but nice-looking, lots of dark hair, about thirty, has a kid. "How you doing tonight? Diet Coke?" she says. She hands him a Coke. He takes the glass, checks his pocket for chips, hands her a red. "Thanks," she says.

Roylynn looks at the slot machines. "You doing any good? That ten-dollar Double Diamond on the end," she says, pointing, "it's been hitting all night. Last night, too." She pats the machine as she walks away.

Steve sits down and feeds it a hundred-dollar bill. First pull: double diamonds in two windows, but the third turns up empty. Nothing. Still, the heart stops. He plays the machine for a while, winning some, losing some, working it up to three hundred before it tanks. When he's down to four credits, he decides to go two at a time. On the second pull, the last of his original hundred, he hits two double diamonds and a single bar—eight hundred dollars.

"Was that so hard?" he says to the machine.

He collects the coins, carefully wedging them into plastic racks the casino provides, then cashes in and heads for the blackjack table.

Rick is standing there watching the game. "Where are you?" he says as Steve sits down.

"Close," Steve says. "You?"

"Up three," he says. "I'm going to find Mary and take a break." He wanders out into the main casino and sees Mary in front of a Wild Cherry machine. She's surrounded by buckets of tokens. There are six buckets, each full of dollar tokens.

"Jesus Christ," Rick says. "What are you doing here?"

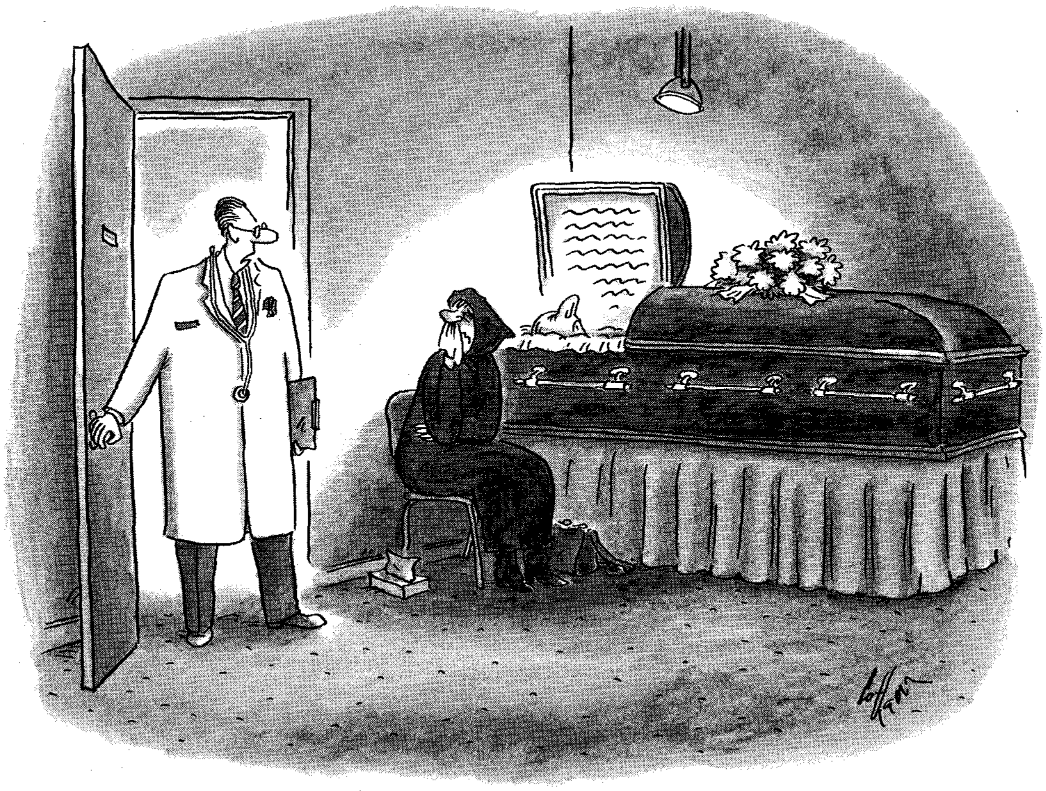
"I don't know," Mary says. "I just keep pulling and they keep coming."

He watches her hit two more jackpots, then asks if she's hungry.

"Food's bad," she says. "Besides, what do you think, I'm nuts? I'm playing here." She knuckles the machine.

He goes upstairs and gets a hamburger, eats it staring at his reflection in the black window that's supposed to overlook the Mississippi Sound. The restaurant is bright and smells of soaps and cleaning solvents. No people.

WHEN he's done, Rick returns to the salon, to another table. He plays there until six, buying in twice more, and losing eight thousand dollars. Just like that. The last



"Sorry, wrong room."

• •

three thousand goes on a single bet.

"Always the big ones," Rick says as the dealer sweeps his chips.

"Seems that way, doesn't it?" she says.

He's now five thousand down. He goes back to Lollie's table. There's a replacement dealer, Lou Ann, a young, plain woman in her late twenties, brown hair, glasses, a schoolmarmish look. No one else at the table. He buys two thousand and starts by betting hundreds. She's good, fast, efficient, sure. The cards seem to come to him, and soon he's betting two hands at once, and winning. In another few minutes, he's got sixty-five hundred in black chips stacked up, ten to a stack, six and a half stacks. They stretch out along the cushion of the table.

He's only five hundred dollars shy of his nut, so he begins to play cautiously, reducing his bets. Looking the length of the casino, he can see light outside. It's six-thirty in the morning. For some reason, the caution hurts his game, and he starts losing again.

He ups the bet, loses. Ups again, loses more. By seven, he's out of chips.

He goes back to the cage for another two thousand, returns to find Lollie back from her break. He kills some time going to the men's room, waiting for the replacement dealer.

Lou Ann's wearing a bracelet of black web cloth with the letters "WWJD" embroidered in it. When she's back, he plays a few hands on his new chips—small hands, quarters and fifty-dollar bets.

He asks her what "WWJD" stands for.

"What would Jesus do," she says.

"Right," he says. "Why didn't I know that?"

He starts winning. In a few minutes, he's back to forty-five hundred. At ten after eight, he bets two thousand dollars, the table maximum, and gets an eleven, a hand you always double down on. Lou Ann has a six showing. Things couldn't be better. The six means she'll have to hit, and her chances of busting are good. With eleven, Rick can't bust. Any face will work.

He puts out another two thousand. He's now got four thousand bet and only five hundred left in front of him. He tells the dealer to wait a minute.

Steve has appeared and is standing nearby. "Monkey," he says. "Big monkey. Joe Young." Monkey means face card. Rick nods and smiles, and then slides behind the empty adjacent table until he's a full table away. Ethel, the pit person, is watching him with curiosity.

"Go ahead. Deal it," Rick says. "Deal it face down, please."

Shenanigans of this kind are allowed when they don't disturb anybody and when you're betting four thousand dollars. Lou Ann looks to Ethel, who nods. Lou Ann slides Rick's hit card face down under the seven and the four. Hitting a double down, you get only one card.

Then the dealer turns her down card over; it's a two, so she's got eight total. She deals herself another card, a three. Now she's got eleven. She pauses.

Rick's heart sinks. He shakes his head. He's lost confidence in his hand. He knows he's lost everything. She's got eleven and she's bound to turn up a face card, a ten, for twenty-one. He hasn't looked at his card, but he'll probably have a crappy six to go with his eleven.

Rick is now hiding behind Ethel, who is chubby, five and a half feet tall. He has his hands on her shoulders. The dealer turns over her next card. It's a five; she now has sixteen. She must hit it again. She looks at Rick, then at Ethel, then slowly rolls the card.

Ethel, a good twelve feet away from the table, says quietly, "Too much. She's gone."

Rick looks. He can't imagine how Ethel can read the card from that distance. But she's said it, so he believes it. He pecks Ethel on the back of her head and then does a little jump before returning to the table to watch the dealer count out his four thousand dollars' worth of winnings. Two new stacks, twenty chips tall, two thousand dollars each.

He's now five hundred dollars short of his nine. He counts out five hundred, slides it into the circle, wins a quick hand with a twenty to the dealer's eighteen. Now he's even.

He says to Lou Ann, "Have you got one more in you?"

She says, "I don't know." She's clearly not eager for him to bet again. Not because she's afraid he'll win but because she's afraid he'll lose.

He takes five hundred dollars off his stack and puts it in the betting circle, wins another hand, and pushes the five hundred he's won across the table.

"For you guys," he says to Lou Ann.

She looks at Ethel, who nods. Lou Ann then changes the blacks into greens and drops the chips into the plastic toke box. "Dropping five hundred for the dealers," she says.

"Thank you," Rick says, his heart suddenly pounding.

"It was my pleasure," she says.

Rick colors up and says to Steve, "Are we ready? I hope we're ready. You all right?"

"Yeah," Steve says. "Mary's over by the escalator."

Steve goes to clean up and Rick goes to get Mary and soon they are on their way out of the casino and out to the cars. It's light out and hot, almost nine o'clock. Mary has won sixty dollars and Steve four hundred, and Rick has risked a little fortune and come away unbloodied. After some traffic in Gulfport, Highway 49 is quiet, nearly empty, and there's not much on the roadsides, either. It's fields and power lines and early-morning sun. It's a big farm out there.

II

RICK AND STEVE BARTHELME arrived in Hattiesburg nine years apart. They'd both held plenty of jobs—cabdriver, construction worker, advertising copywriter, journalist, gallery worker, architectural draftsman—and had both got graduate degrees at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, and now they were ready to settle down and teach.

Rick arrived in the mid-seventies, terrified because the state had a reputation—burning, hanging, rape, etc. He grew up in Houston and lived in New York City for five years, and had just finished graduate school at Hopkins; he figured that he was profoundly enlightened and that Mississippi wasn't. Indeed, his introduction to Hattiesburg was at an all-night gas station on Highway 49 where a lone half-wit teen-ager was corralling "pinching" bugs and dropping them in a five-gallon bucket of sand—a diversion he favored because, he said, he liked to watch the bugs kill one another. This was at two in the morning, and Rick and his girlfriend had been driving all day from Baltimore, where the week before they'd had brunch with the British literary critic Tony Tanner in the polished-mahogany restaurant of a hundred-year-old hotel. Now instead of talking about postmodernism they were staring at it, and it didn't seem to know their name.

In time, Rick discovered that Mississippi was as civilized as anywhere else. Things had apparently changed, the gas jockey notwithstanding, and at least in Hattiesburg and around the university there wasn't any burning and hanging. In fact, taken as a whole, the people in Mississippi seemed gentler and more humane than many he'd run into in ostensibly finer settings.

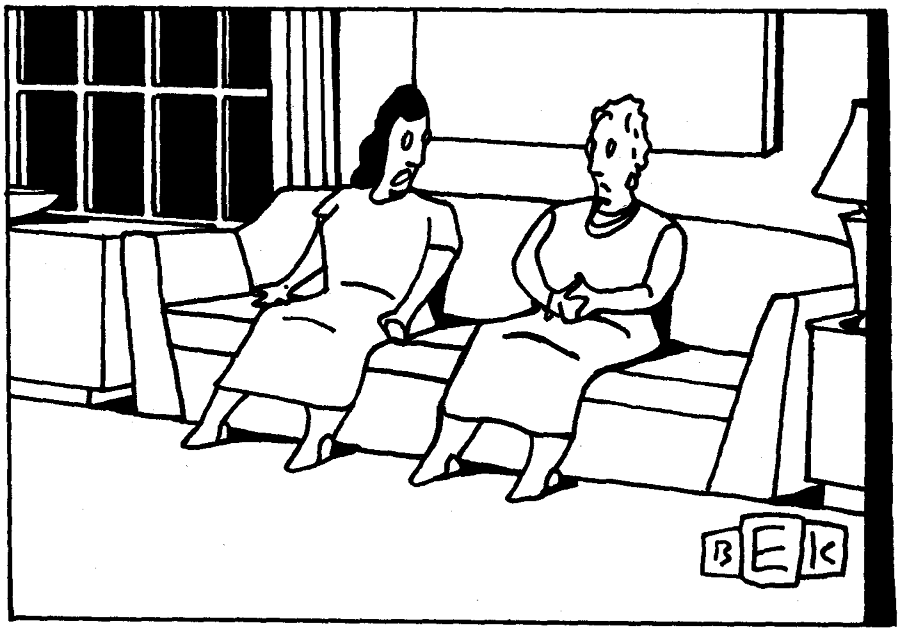
Steve arrived nine years later, having spent the previous two years teaching at a university in Monroe, a dim, depressed, trash-strewn Louisiana town where even the snakes hung their heads. To Steve, Hattiesburg was clean and bright. A decided improvement.

So there they were, college professors, fiction writers. They were born in Texas, reared in a family of fallen Catholics, with a father who was a successful and innovative architect and a mother who was an English teacher. One older brother, Donald, had been a leading literary figure. Two other older siblings made their living writing: Joan as a public-relations vice-president for Pennzoil Company, Pete as a Houston advertising executive and author of mystery novels.

Aesthetics and writing, art, music, film, narrative, character, culture—this stuff made up their lives. Books and movies in a pleasant little town handsome beyond probability, lush and green year round, forty-four thousand souls at the intersection of a few highways. Perfectly congenial, although, perhaps, short on excitement.

ENTER the boats: suddenly, in 1992, there were casinos in Mississippi. The casinos appeared as paddle wheelers docked against the beaches. They were cramped, crowded, intimidating, with long lines of customers waiting to get in.

The beaches had never been much good. The sand had been sucked out of the Mississippi Sound and carefully spread alongside Highway 90 like something in the bottom of an aquarium. It looked wrong, like a bad hairpiece. The water was the color of well-done beef; locals said people loved Florida's emerald water, but fish, shrimp, and crab preferred Mississippi's brown. They were an industry. The towns strung along the coast had some of the dumpy charm of Galveston,



"If, indeed, there is a reason for all this, then that's so much worse."

where Rick and Steve's father was born, where they'd visited their grandparents as children, and where they'd played on the winningly dishevelled Stewart Beach.

From Biloxi to Pass Christian to Bay St. Louis and Waveland, the coast towns were similarly distressed, beat up and ugly in an interesting way, but now, with the advent of "gaming," the towns were tarted up to look new and wholesome. The honorable if cheesy glitz of miniature golf and bright-pink seashell emporia gave way to paddleboat quaint: cheap tux shirts, black bow ties, red cartoon suspenders.

Gaming interests wanted casino gambling to seem like fun for the whole family, so casinos started looking like pirate ships and cowboy saloons, illumined by harmlessly cheerful neon (splashy pots of gold) instead of the furtive neon of the old beachfront strip ("Nudes! Nudes! Nudes!"). There were ten- and twenty-story hotels, parking lots, restaurants, stores.

Biloxi had a great old restaurant called Fisherman's Wharf, a shoddy wood-frame thing built up on telephone-pole pilings right on the Sound. It had been serving seafood for over forty years. Family-owned, dilapidated, but the food was marvellous in the way that only coastal dives can manage—fresh fish, fried chicken, big glasses of sweet tea. Gerald Ford had eaten there, and the restaurant had pictures of him arriving in a big limousine. Gerald Ford's plate was preserved behind glass, along with the silverware he'd used, his napkin, the menu he'd looked at.

After 1992, an Oriental-motif casino called Lady Luck appeared next door—a barge decked out like a Chinese restaurant, complete with dragons and lanterns and fans. One Saturday when Rick and Rie were eating at the restaurant, they spent the meal eying this new casino. Afterward, they decided to give it a try.

Lady Luck was larger than the paddleboats—higher ceilings, more room. It was garish and silly inside, but charming in its way. The Oriental decoration was oddly coupled with loud pop music, waves of colored lights, and women in startlingly short skirts and tight tops. It was chilly in the casino, even in August.

They walked around, looked over the shoulders of the table-games players, tried their hand at video poker and at the slot machines. They started with quarters and won a little, then moved up to half-dollars and dollars. At a bank of dollar machines, one of them hit a small jackpot, and then the other hit one. Two sevens and a wild cherry. A minute later, Rick hit a five-hundred-dollar jackpot.

Pretty soon they were carrying around buckets of dollar tokens, and gambling didn't seem so bad. They walked out with eleven hundred dollars of the casino's money, feeling as though they'd won the lottery. Eleven hundred dollars that wasn't theirs.

Later, a similar thing would happen to Steve and Melanie.

They learned that this was typical, that it happened just this way for a lot of people who went to casinos. You won something sizable, and thereafter gambling took up residence in your imagination. You remembered the visit when you decided to return. It was a key to the business—the first time, you walked away with the casino's money.

When Rick and Steve compared notes about these first trips, they indulged a light euphoria. Casinos were

DAUGHTER DEAREST

"Lizzie Borden took an axe and gave her mother forty whacks. When she saw what she had done, she gave her father forty-one." This grisly nursery rhyme becomes chillingly fresh when it's chanted by children in the final moments of "Lizzie Borden," an opera by the composer Jack Beeson, whose music mixes spiky modernism with American folksiness. Operagoers who saw Rhoda Levine's spare, Hopperesque production at Glimmerglass several summers ago were struck by the staying power of this 1965 work and by the commanding performance of the mezzo-soprano Phyllis Pancella (left), in the title role. Levine's staging opens at New York City Opera on March 6th, and, with one of the two victims—the narcissistic stepmother—sung by the company's most exciting soprano, Lauren Flanigan (right), Pancella's slow-to-boil axe murderess should be even more affecting.

Photograph by Chris Callis

garish and grotesque and maybe the people were seedy, but money was swell. They talked about buying books on slot machines, finding out which ones to play, what the odds were, how to maximize advantage and minimize risk. They were serious and excited; something new had come into their otherwise quiet lives. But they had no idea just how much those first jackpots would eventually cost.

III

IN the first few years after the boats came to the coast, we gambled when we could. We played at Gulfport, Biloxi, Natchez, and Lafayette, but we didn't play for much—a couple of hundred dollars here and there.

It was entertainment. We'd go in, wander, play the slot machines, play video poker, tell jokes, come home. Once, Rick lost six hundred dollars in Natchez, and it seemed as if the sky had fallen. He and Rie walked back to the wonderful old Eola Hotel, where they had a penthouse room with a view of the Mississippi, and Rick promised that his gambling was over. This was a promise he would make often in the future.

Then, early in 1995, our mother died. On the preceding December 23rd, she'd entered the hospital, eighty-seven, malnourished, only intermittently lucid, and a week later she stopped eating.

It's possible that both our mother and our father played inordinately important roles in our lives. We had girlfriends and wives but no children, no new families to replace the one in which we had grown up, so right into middle age "the family" still meant our parents. Even nephews and nieces were a little outside the immediate circle—Mother, Father, and the five children, making up a tiny, insular, private world.

When Mother died, we were fiercely quiet. People had spoken too much when our brother Don died, in 1989. Two old friends—Roger Angell, Jack Barth—wrote brief, lovely eulogies. But Don was a minor public celebrity, as well as a major figure in the literary community, and everybody wanted a piece of him. And took it, too, one after another. People who knew him in passing, or professionally, published intimate poems and essays about him. People of the most tenuous acquaintance attached themselves ever so firmly in public after his death, distorting his memory a bit, commodifying him for their own purposes. It was a messy thing and went on for years after he died, until there was no more mileage to be wrung out of public mourning.

"Here's a nice one. It was confiscated from a little old drunk lady."

So Mother's death was matter-of-fact, and private, and afterward the gambling got much more intense. We were no longer playing little slots. We played only the five-, ten-, and twenty-five-dollar machines. And we stuck to salon blackjack, where the minimum bet was twenty-five dollars and the tables were dressed in glamorous purple felt. Dealers would stop what they were doing to say hello, and cashiers knew us by name and were eager to slide our credit cards through their machines. Everyone seemed to like us a lot. We became regulars at the casinos in Biloxi and, later, Gulfport.

We won sometimes, four or five trips in a row, coming home with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars of the casino's money, but there always seemed to be that sixth trip, or a seventh, when we would lose ten thousand in one night, a loss that easily eliminated the winnings.

There was a new intensity to our play, something so subtle that we only vaguely noted it, putting it down to a combination of factors—a feeling that we ought to be able to figure out a way to win, coupled with the knowledge (from the books we'd been reading) that we probably weren't going to win and, added to that, the recognition that our gambling wasn't "sensible."

We might not notice the intensity of what we were doing until we were on the way home, down fifteen hundred dollars. Or it might appear in the way we cursed the slot machine that we'd just hit for a big jackpot, while we were waiting for the little ceremony with the cash payoff and the W-2G form. It might be felt when we pushed whatever money we had left—three hundred-dollar bills, say, or a couple of twenties—out onto a spot at a blackjack table and said, "Money plays," a loser's custom we made our own.

At the table, losing our money, we were all smiles, as if it were nothing. In fact, it felt like nothing. Money isn't money in a casino. At home, you might drive across town to save a buck on a box of

Tide, but at the table you tip a cocktail waitress five bucks for bringing a free drink. You do both these things on the same day.

And then, on July 16th the following year, our father died. Rick was executor, and we had to leave for Houston, eight hours away, that afternoon.

We would be the "cleaners," as in a spy movie—our job to get in, take care of the mess, make it look as if our father had never been there, and get out. Father was the last of the original Barthelmes in Houston, and when we were done there wouldn't be a trace of us left, which mattered only in its echo of a time when the city was part of our sense of something that might last forever: the family.

The drive over was eerie—a little too familiar, too commonplace. We stopped for hamburgers at the Burger King in Crowley, Louisiana, just as we'd always stopped when driving to Houston for Christmas and summer visits. We spent time acquainting ourselves with Father's death, trying it on, getting the sense of it. When we got to his town-house apartment in Houston, the bed things were all clean and folded on the bare mattress in the living room. He had moved downstairs, been living there, not using the second floor, where the bedrooms were. The dining-room table was covered with papers, a big checkbook, reminder lists, worn twenty-year-old green file folders, labelled "Bills," "Investments," "Gas & Electric," carefully arranged. Everything orderly. His wallet, his keys. His financial records. That first night, sitting with nothing to do in the silent apartment, we glanced through the files, looking for wills and codicils, debts, deeds. When everything was done, it seemed the remaining four children would inherit something over half a million dollars.

We spent a week cleaning up the place, tearing down things Father had built there, tearing out built-in cabinetry, drafting tables, the stereo system, emptying the closets, throwing away everything we could bear to throw away: beds and pots and pans and half-bottles of liquor; paper, pens, and pencils. Soap, salt, houseplants, toothpaste, towels, Windex, zinc ointment, the ordinary supplies of day-to-day living.

There were some psychological leaks. On the fourth day, Steve was in the upstairs office working on the trash lumber for more than an hour, using a couple of Father's screwdrivers and a claw hammer to remove the nails and screws from the stacked pine and plywood of the already disassembled homemade filing cabinets and tables, working maybe a half hour ahead of the guy coming to haul it all away to the dump.

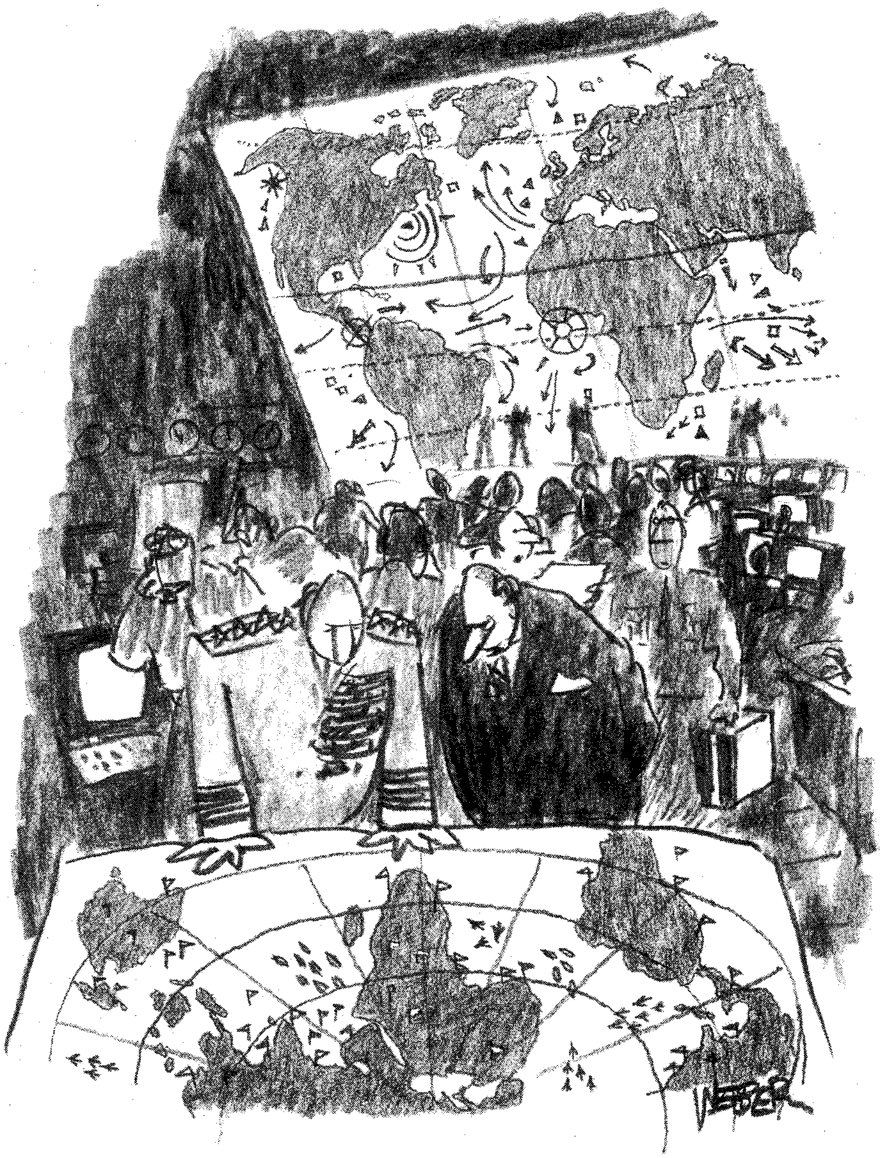
"The skin on the organic chicken was thick and greasy, so I got rid of it."

• •

Rick piled clothes and junk we didn't want on our parents' bed, waiting for the Salvation Army people to come. A few things we packed in boxes, some stuff of Mother's—slippers, dresses she wore often, what jewelry there was left, a coffee cup. We did the same with Father's things, though we picked different objects. Not his clothes or shoes or leather jacket, though we did pick his hat, the comical gray leather cap he used to wear on his walks, cocked back on his head, but other things that were special to him, or seemed especially like him. We picked architectural books—Corbu and Mies, Gropius, Neutra, Wright, Aalto. His Leicas. A seventy-year-old handsaw that had belonged to his father, who had owned a lumberyard in Galveston.

We spent long days packing, taking things apart, and throwing junk away. It was hard work, sweaty work, and it went on from ten o'clock in the morning until two or three the next morning, seven days solid. Our father and mother had lived in the apartment for twenty years. They were dug in. We worked like maniacs, crating and carrying and dragging stuff to a Dumpster, wrapping and packing and labelling. Non-stop. One of our nephews helped out one day, and Pete drove in a couple of times, but mostly it was just the two of us working in that apartment, erasing our parents bit by bit.

It amounted to burying them in brand-new cardboard boxes, and we stacked the boxes carefully in the apartment, numbered each one of them, detailed their contents on the outside. We planned, made lists, telephoned, decided, bought, shipped, worked together. Without our realizing it, this funeral had become a weeklong affair, a



"World War III? Hmm. O.K., but, remember, nobody gets hurt."

• •

ceremony that evoked for us the projects of our childhood, times when the family used to pull together for some house or landscaping chore, or even to prepare for a hurricane that the radio was sure was coming straight up Galveston Bay. In these projects, everyone would get assigned tasks, day after day, and the air was electric with the importance of the undertaking, and the family was a goddam army.

So were we when tearing down the house. And finally, after visits from Goodwill, the Blue Bird Circle, a last walk-through by the movers, we were back on Interstate 10, headed home, our parents' things relegated to the boxes, and then—a week later, when the movers made it to Hattiesburg—to Outback Storage shed 233, a place for them in perpetuity, a modern-day mausoleum. As if they were Egyptian royalty, we buried their property, their jewels, tools, and stationery, and for months afterward we went to the shed, mostly late at night—two, three, four in the morning—unlocked the padlock, lifted the rolling steel door, clicked on the light with the fifteen-minute timer, and walked among the boxes of their papers and photographs and clothes, among the chairs we'd saved, the dining table padded with packing quilts, the Laverne-covered folding screen that Father had built, the marble slab that had been a coffee table.

Now they were entirely dead, and we were alone and middle-aged and nothing really mattered all that much anyway. They had seen us through to comfortable adulthood. We had seen them through to death.

LATER, on drives to the casino—the two of us alone for an hour and a half, driving through the hot Mississippi nights, through an impenetrable, swampy fog, so thick that tail-lights emerged suddenly in front of us like miniature U.F.O.s—our parents came to mind and the exchanges between us grew short, tight, and clean; not much needed to be said. There was a shared knowledge, a common experience, harmonies of sadness, melancholy, loss. Each of us knew how the other felt. So the exchanges were elliptical—lots of dots, just what was needed. And it was a reassuring thing, to be in that car together, driving to Biloxi or Gulfport, each knowing what the other felt, not needing to make it explicit, understanding the loss. The complexity and strangeness of it, the two of us, the last and youngest of the original Barthelmes, now alone.

IV

BEFORE our father died, we paid for our gambling from our salaries or our savings. But after he died we had an inheritance. We drove to the coast, played all night, lost five thousand dollars, came home, taught our classes, made jokes about how horrible it had been, and waited for the next chance to go. The losses didn't bother us—after all, it wasn't really our money, it was his—and in hindsight we should have been tipped off that something wicked that way was.

Instead, we went home in the morning, called newfound brokers handling accounts to which our father's estate had been distributed, sold stocks and bonds to cover the night's losses. At first, there was plenty of money in the accounts and not so much being lost. It was easy to sell five thousand dollars' worth of bonds to cover a loss. It felt like high finance. Arriving at home at nine in the morning, we might make a few calls to Boston, tycoon style, move some money, cover debts before going to bed and trying to catch four or five hours of sleep before classes that afternoon.

We were playing in Gulfport because

it was closest. We tried craps and Mini-Bac, but we concentrated on blackjack. We bought books—Edward O. Thorp's, Arnold Snyder's, Bryce Carlson's, others. We researched card counts—the Red Seven count, the Thorp count, the Zen count. We memorized "basic strategy," a system that determined how you should play based on the two cards you'd been dealt and the card the dealer had showing, simple mathematical probabilities compressed into an action table that you could print on the back of a business card. They sold these cards at the casinos, but we made our own—"The Win While You Sleep Blackjack Strategy Card."

The problem is that none of the strategies work unless you are counting cards. Counting, you can get a slight advantage—a half per cent, sometimes as much as one and a half. A blackjack table goes through sixty to a hundred hands an hour, so even if you're betting modestly you can make money counting, just as long as the standard deviation doesn't get you.

But the more we studied the less interesting counting became. You had to concentrate and be careful and watch everything with headache eyes. Card counting was about as much fun as waste management. The whole thing started looking like work, and we already had work. We didn't want more. So, in the end, although we learned "basic strategy," we played pretty much by ear. We counted cards sometimes, but ad hoc, not a way experts recommend. And we lost. At first not so much, but then a lot. And then we lost a lot more.

We played blackjack with different styles, although the result was the same for both of us. Steve played cautiously, thoughtfully, with patience, marshalling his money, inching ahead, then falling behind, and then, in the course of twelve, eighteen, or twenty-four hours, fighting his way back from terrible losses. He might play from midnight until eight in the morning and lose four thousand dollars, and then play from eight that morning until two the following morning and win three thousand of it back. On a good night, he might take home a thousand dollars.

Rick played kamikaze style, betting carefully at first, and then, abandoning caution, jacking up his bets to five hundred dollars, or suddenly putting everything he had on the table—two thousand dollars on a single deal. Why not? Or he'd bet three thousand on each of two hands, and then double both, leaving him with six thousand dollars hanging on the turn of the next card. Play like this resulted, more often than not, in punishing losses.

When one of us got far behind and started getting anxious and betting aggressively, the other tried to counsel him, slow him down. It never worked, but we tried anyway.

In fact, one of the curiosities of our co-dependency was that we were rarely both down or both up at the same time. This made for some tension. Once Rick was up sixty-five hundred at first light while Steve was still down two grand. Rick felt that he had to wait, and moseyed around the casino pushing money into slot machines. After a time, he got interested in a particular twenty-five-dollar machine and took a seat. Always a bad sign. Half an hour later, Steve came by to report that he was even, but by then Rick had dropped five grand and was seething.

IT'S a terrible feeling to be far ahead and then start losing in a way that you just can't stop—an ineluctable fall, like gravity. It makes for a frenzied abandon. You don't care about money anymore. You want to lose it. You stuff cash into the slots as fast as it'll go, and even as you're doing it you know it's hopeless. This is not the routine hopelessness of regular slot play; this is different, a unique despair, gambling in the recognition that you have no chance, that you will lose whatever you do. You persist in playing anyway. It happens at blackjack tables, too—you throw money on a spot, make wild, silly bets, which, were they to come in, would make you whole again. But you know they're not coming in.

How do you know? That's also a puzzle. You begin to sense that, for all the mathematics, the calculations, the odds, the multiplying strategies of working the percentages, some wholly other thing is at work, some loopy otherworldly thing. It seems built into the cards. There sometimes comes a point when you begin to think you know the cards before they're dealt. You've made a big bet, you're holding an eighteen and the dealer is showing an eight, and you think you've "pushed," you're safe. Then you think, Unless she has an ace. No sooner have you had the second thought than you know that she has the ace. You wish she didn't, but you know she does. And when she flips her down card there it is, the ace. And you lose again. Then you think that you caused her to have the ace by thinking of it.

ONE time, Steve was playing video poker, sitting in the middle of a row of machines. On one side was a Vietnamese guy and on the other a chubby middle-aged white woman. They were playing when Steve arrived and had already struck up an acquaintance. They were loudly cajoling their machines to behave and talking to each other over Steve's head. Sometimes the woman called the guy down to her machine to show him what she'd got, and sometimes it was for his advice about a draw. It was clear that they had just met.

Steve was there half an hour, winning and losing. He turned up a new hand: four hearts—ace, queen, jack, and ten—and the seven of clubs. That is, four of the five cards you need to form a royal straight flush, the best possible hand in poker.

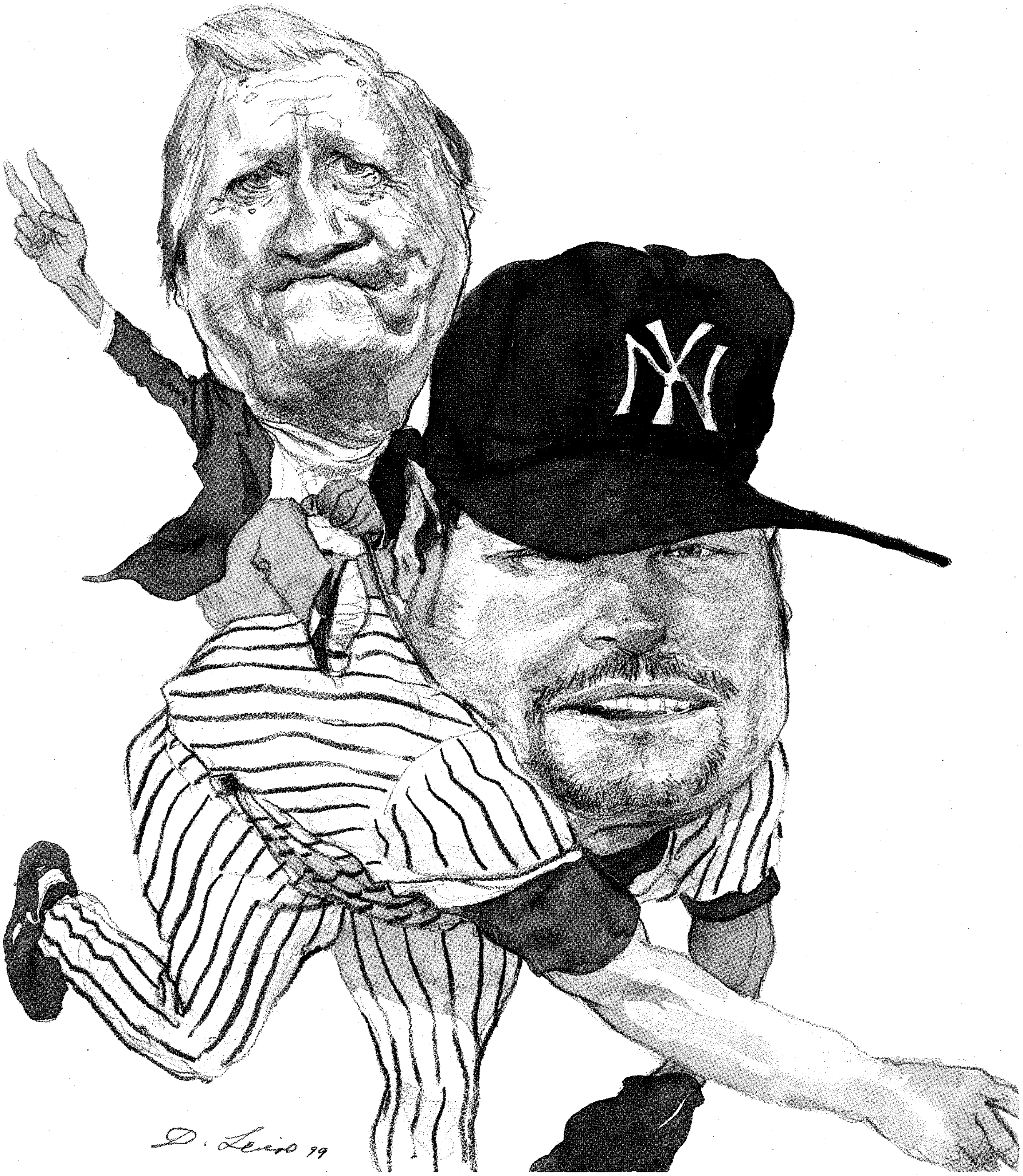
Steve carefully pressed the "hold" button above each of the hearts and double-checked that he'd pressed the buttons correctly. He said, "King," and pressed the "draw" button. The seven of clubs fell away and the king of hearts appeared. The perfect hand.

The Vietnamese guy knew instantly. "Royal flush," he declared, in the way one might say "It's a girl!" or "He's alive!" He looked from Steve to the screen and back again. The screen itself was pretty excited, flashing the cards of the royal flush on and off in mysterious sequence.

"Let me tell her," the guy said. He pointed to the chubby woman. It wasn't "Please let me tell her." It was "Stop. Don't do a thing until I tell her." He waved for her attention, told her what had happened on a machine that she herself had probably been playing

SKETCHBOOK BY DAVID LEVINE

THE NEW HORSE


NY
D. Levine 99

minutes earlier. The woman gave a slight smile, sighed, and returned to her machine more fiercely committed than ever.

That win was on a dollar machine, two hundred and fifty dollars, but the money wasn't the point. The point was perfection. A perfect thing had happened. This is the seduction and the appeal of gambling: the idea that perfection is possible. All the people in a casino understand the concept; they may be crude or dizzy or deluded, but they all know how to imagine life as something more than a dreary chore. They can see that something wonderful might happen, something that could change their lives—this is their fool's secret, one they share with drunks, children, and artists.

We found that we understood these gamblers better than we understood the men and women of the university where we worked, people who—full of purpose and high sentence and, often, considerable charm—seemed curiously reduced when it came to vision and possibility. They had grown up, become professional, acquired some wisdom, and accepted things as they were.

We had dear friends among these folks, but taken as a whole the milieu of the department was a bit quiet. Our gamblers were serious not like academics but in the furious way that children are serious, concentrating on play, oblivious, intense yet at ease. They came to the casino to be children, because gambling is a child's vice practiced by adults, often by the old. Every day, after eight in the morning, clouds of gray-haired folk arrived in buses from the airport or along the coast from Florida. We were often there to greet them. Many were sixty and seventy. They had come to play. Because money is involved, this play had an extra edge, but it was still play, and they were still children. That was something we understood. We were children. We had, we felt, suffered enough boredom, done enough work, assumed enough responsibility, and watched enough hypocrisy not to worry about or feel shame in being children again.

It may have had something to do with our father, whose childishness was among his most attractive features. He had a child's curiosity and a child's fascination, a capacity for focussing on things with an extraordinary present-tense intensity. He had a child's intolerance of boredom and an innocent passion: he was always doing things because they were, he felt, the things he should do; he was an optimist and an idealist. He held on to the insistent hope that things could be better, would be better if you tried hard enough, if you just kept at it. It was a gambler's optimism and a dreamer's idealism. That idealism was one of his abiding gifts to his sons, who customarily disguised their own, incomplete version of it with a flinty, defensive irony, which they were bright enough not to take seriously.

Maybe our childlike interest in play blossomed without warning because, suddenly, we no longer had our parents. Because suddenly, in middle age, we were children again, and we were lost without Mother and Father. Or it might have been the notion that this money of theirs was a poor substitute for the people themselves, who had taught us everything, told us that jokes were proper and complex, shown us the ambiguities of the everyday.

IN the year after our mother's death, we lost about a hundred thousand dollars. We played less in the early part of 1996, but after our father died, in July, we started gambling with renewed determination. We lost seventy thousand dollars in the three months after his death. In 1997, we lost considerably less, but by November our combined losses amounted to well over a quarter of a million dollars.

We rationalized the losses by reminding ourselves that it was money we'd inherited, and that, as we'd never had much money, money had never really meant that much to us—so why not spend it? After all, we had been gambling before we had an inheritance: we didn't want to stop now. And, besides, with the new money, we had a chance to win back what we'd lost. Our father had worked long and hard to acquire and then save this money, and we knew it was the only large sum we would ever see. But, with money to cover our losses, gambling became a lot easier—more efficient, even comfortable. When we exceeded our lines of credit at the casino, we borrowed against our credit cards, sometimes ten or fifteen thousand dollars at a time, which we then paid back from investment money. Then we started in on Father's bonds. The money was going out and never coming back, and even though the money was ours, it was Father's, too, held in separate accounts, which we talked about and treated as if he were still around, looking over our shoulders.

But we didn't stop. We never said, "Hey, let's don't do this. Let's do something else. Let's use the money wisely." What we were doing would drive the old man crazy, and we knew it. We could imagine him hearing that Rick had lost twenty-two thousand dollars in one night. We could see him sitting in his desk chair in his home office, his elbow on the drafting table, his forehead in his hand, his eyes staring at the rug as if there, in that pile, some answer sat.

Maybe in his college days, when he was a swashbuckler, he might have been amused by what we were doing. On occasion, we remarked that it would have been good to have had him with us, since he was easily the best gambler in the family. Of course, we had seen him only at family poker games, but there he was a champ. Who knew, maybe at the casino he could do as well. But he was not with us on our sprees, or if he was with us he was there only in token form, in the hundred-dollar bills folded in half in our pockets, money that was blessed with none of his shrewdness.

V

WE thought we knew what to expect. We'd seen the movies. In the next, final stage, we were supposed to get so intoxicated with our vice that we lost everything: the bank forecloses on the house and the car, we get rid of the cats and dogs, and we land in dereliction and divorce. But none of that happened. At the end of 1996, we still had a little money, we still did our work week in and week out, and our lovers, though exasperated, were still loyal.

So we were winging along, losing big, waiting for the life-destroying catastrophe that all the hand-wringing articles about gambling and vice, all the movies and stories always use as their slam-bang climax, like the scene in

"Days of Wine and Roses" where Jack Lemmon tears his father-in-law's greenhouse apart, ripping plants from their pots, looking for the one in which he has hidden his last bottle of booze. And then it came, our catastrophe. But it came in a form so bizarre that no self-respecting movie would use it.

On the morning of November 11, 1996, after we'd been playing blackjack all night long, several security people came up to our table and ordered us to pick up our chips and follow them. They walked us to the cashier's cage and told us to turn over our chips, refusing to give us money for them and demanding that we pay off markers the casino was holding from a previous trip. As the cashier did the paperwork, we noticed that the shift manager was shaking. The casino's usual chummy behavior—all the sweet grease that its staff used to keep us content and gambling at the tables—had disappeared in an instant.

We followed two of the security people out of the casino, across the gangplank, and into a small concrete room in the parking garage, where they interrogated us and accused us of cheating, in a conspiracy with the dealer, even though we'd lost nearly ten thousand dollars to that dealer that night. They made a few ugly insinuations about us and the dealer. They took Polaroid photographs of us and copied the information off our driver's licenses. And then they told us to leave. If we ever came back to the casino, they said, we would be arrested.

We were amazed, then angry, then afraid. For the first time in more than two years, we stopped gambling.

A short time later, the dealer phoned Rick. She knew that he taught at the university and called him there. She had lost her dealer's license and asked us to testify for her at a gaming-commission hearing. We agreed, but friends told us to see a lawyer. They suggested Boyce Holleman, a former D.A. in Gulfport, now a defense attorney.

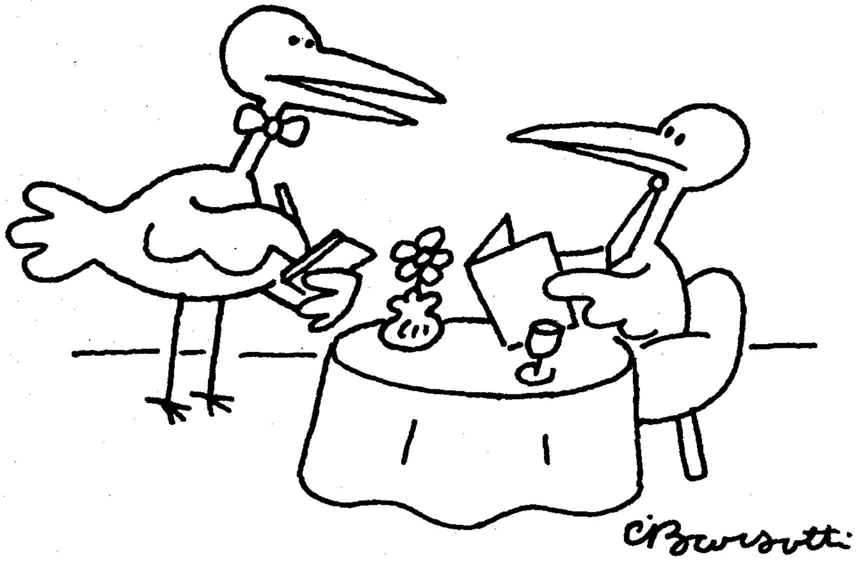
On January 31, 1997, we met Mr. Holleman, polite and friendly, a man in his seventies, who listened to our story, his eyes closed most of the time, except when he lurched forward to drink a root beer from a glass bottle. When he was done, he tossed the bottle over his shoulder into the wastebasket. He had bushy but thinning hair, cowboy boots, a cane, and a drawl worthy of the movies (we learned later that he had used it in film and on television, in the show "In the Heat of the Night"), and he chewed on the wettest, stubbiest unlit cigar you have ever seen in your life. The office, a well-worn wood-panelled ranch-style house just off the water, was peppered with Mr. Holleman's memorabilia—a personal note from J.F.K. and loads of pictures (Holleman chatting with Bob Hope, Holleman in front of an airplane as a Second World War pilot, Holleman with Carroll O'Connor).

He told us that he'd played some blackjack himself, and he was no fan of the gaming laws. There are only felony offenses in Mississippi gaming laws. Some kid takes a dollar token out of a slot tray, it's a goddam felony, he snorted. He told us a story he'd heard about an old man who sat down on a stool to rest, not realizing that the stool was situated in front of a slot machine that had hit a jackpot some moments before. Suddenly people appeared and started giving him money—the winnings from somebody else's jackpot. "You know, he hadn't looked where he was, he's just sitting there. He's takin' a load off. These people were giving him money, and so he said, 'Sure, thank you.' " Mr. Holleman held his hand out, accepting the imaginary money, and shrugged. "They arrested him, charged him with a felony."

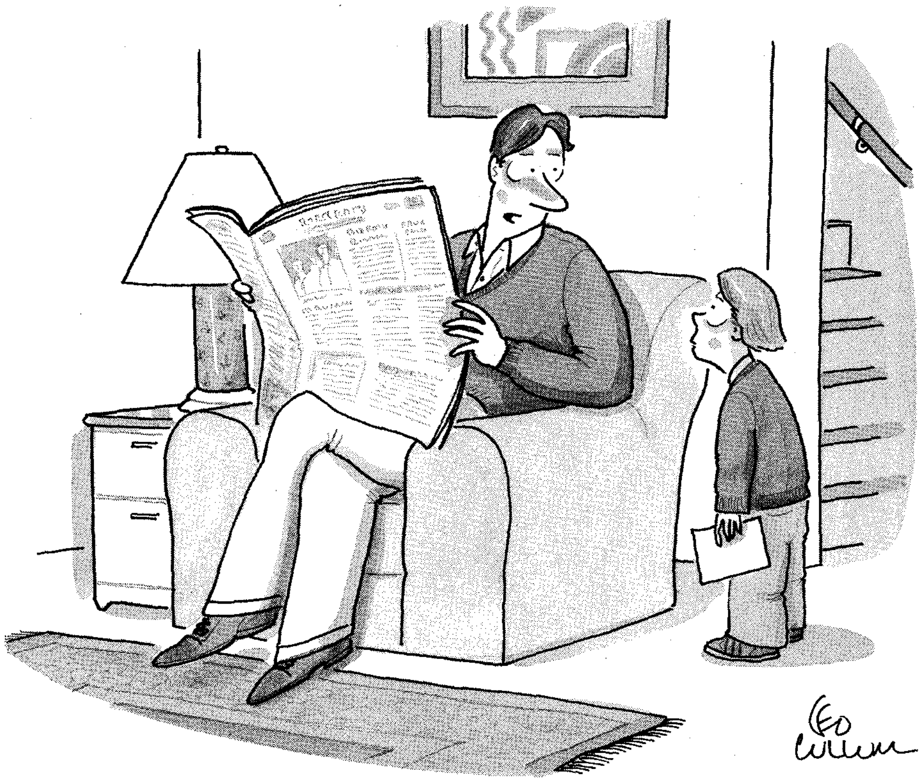
We told him about the dealer's gaming-commission hearing, and, for a number of reasons, he didn't want us to testify, and he said he would see to it that the hearing got postponed until after the dealer's trial, which we all hoped would never take place.

Though we'd been told that Mr. Holleman was the best defense lawyer in the region, meeting him produced in us an odd joy, such as you might feel upon finally meeting the Wizard in Oz. Because of the wonderful things he does. On our way home that day, we felt that having Mr. Holleman on our side, notwithstanding that he had seemed asleep for much of our conference, was powerfully reassuring. From then on, we always called him Mr. Holleman, out of a special respect. And, as the months passed, we worked with his son Tim, a bright, funny chip off the block, whose obvious affection for his father was utterly winning—it was part of his charm. When, by summer, nothing happened, we allowed ourselves to believe that the Hollemans' easygoing attitude had been right all along, that we'd been a touch hysterical. We allowed ourselves to believe that the whole regrettable business had faded away.

And so the inevitable occurred: we started gambling again. It had been only a matter of time. We settled on Biloxi's Casino Magic, an architectural curiosity, faux modern, a barge. It was smaller than the Grand, but the people were pleasant, and we began playing and losing there. Occasionally, we ran into dealers from the Grand—some of them were now working at the Magic—and we wondered whether our difficulties at



"I'm sorry, but you have to be here the minute the doors open if you want worm."



"Daddy's way of helping you with your homework is not to help you."

the Grand were known. Later, we found out that the people at the Magic did know, had known all along, and didn't much care.

This attitude made us exceedingly fond of the Magic, and it became our regular stop. We went once a week, sometimes twice, and had what seemed like markedly better luck there than we had had at the Grand. But we still lost. And, gradually, in the way of these things, our gambling intensified once again. We went more often, stayed longer, played harder, lost more money. By late fall, we had made around thirty trips. We had finally lost the remainder of our inheritance, about eighty thousand dollars.

Then, in early December, 1997, more than a year after the incident at the Grand, the dealer called to tell us that she'd been indicted and that we were named in the indictment. Later, we learned that we weren't just named; we had been indicted as well. We were charged with a felony and if found guilty might be sentenced to a fine and two years in prison.

We were eventually indicted on two counts, one applying to November 3, 1996, and one applying to November 11th. The charge was the same in both instances. The indictment said that Cynthia Bernice Wojciechowski (the dealer), Steven Barthelme, and Frederick Barthelme

> did wilfully, unlawfully and feloniously acquire knowledge, not available to all players, of the outcome of blackjack games at Grand Casino-Gulfport, a Minnesota corporation, and then did use that information to place or forego bets on same by having knowledge of the dealer's cards for the purpose of placing or not placing insurance bets on the game of blackjack.

"Insurance" is the bet you can place once all the cards have been dealt and the dealer is showing an ace. At that moment, you don't know what the dealer's second card is, but there's a chance that it could be a face card and that the dealer would have blackjack. When the dealer gets blackjack, she wins; if you have insured, you don't lose anything.

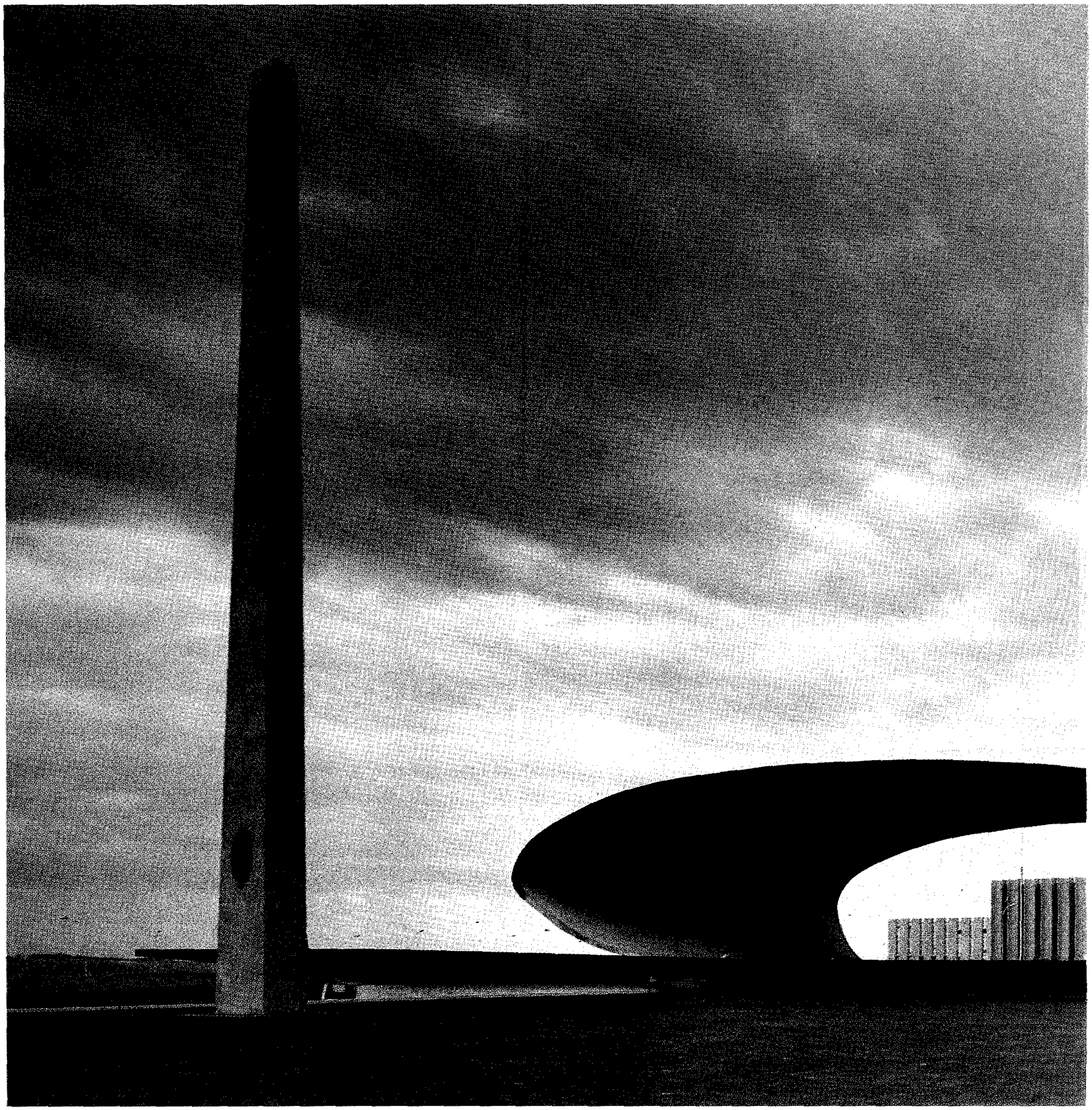
THE charges were the first step in our descent into a bewildering, terrifying legal mess that was far worse than Jack Lemmon's trashed greenhouse. In December, we drove to the Harrison County jail and were booked. It was the first time either of us had seen the inside of a jail. The cops were polite, as were our fellow-prisoners, and we were there only an hour or so. But we got the idea.

That was fifteen months ago. Since then, we've been waking up thinking about this catastrophe and going to sleep at night thinking about it. Our lives have not been destroyed, but they aren't particularly happy. If we were younger, this might have been an adventure—good old-fashioned Strangelovian fun. But we are not younger. And it has not been fun.

For obvious reasons, and on the advice of our counsel, we are unable to discuss the charges any further. Although we believe the charges have no basis and should be dismissed, we are resigned to the prospect of a trial. That trial was recently scheduled for March 1st. It has now been postponed again.

And, of course, all through last year, we carried on playing, even though, by now, we'd lost everything we had managed to save and everything our parents left us. But the casino still had its allure. We loved the place. We liked the smiles on the dealers' faces, the greetings from the pit personnel, the snide sideways inclusive jokes people made that seemed to say, You're one of us, you guys belong here. We knew better, but sometimes the satisfactions of being taken for a ride exceed the discomfort of knowing that you have been. Or, put another way, the ride is so much fun you want to take it regardless of the cost.

The psychiatrist who works at the bus stop would have a field day with us—guilt, depression, loss, loneliness, destroying the inheritance. But that doesn't take into account the seductiveness of gambling itself. The excitement. The giddy foolish mindlessness. To go there and to lose felt strangely heroic. How crazy we were being, how bad, how stupid. It's easy to diminish this magic in hindsight, but at the time we were deeply in its thrall. It was a remarkably powerful and seductive bit of theatre, with real and bitter consequences, consequences that we wanted. We would have been willing to win, but we were content to lose. ♦

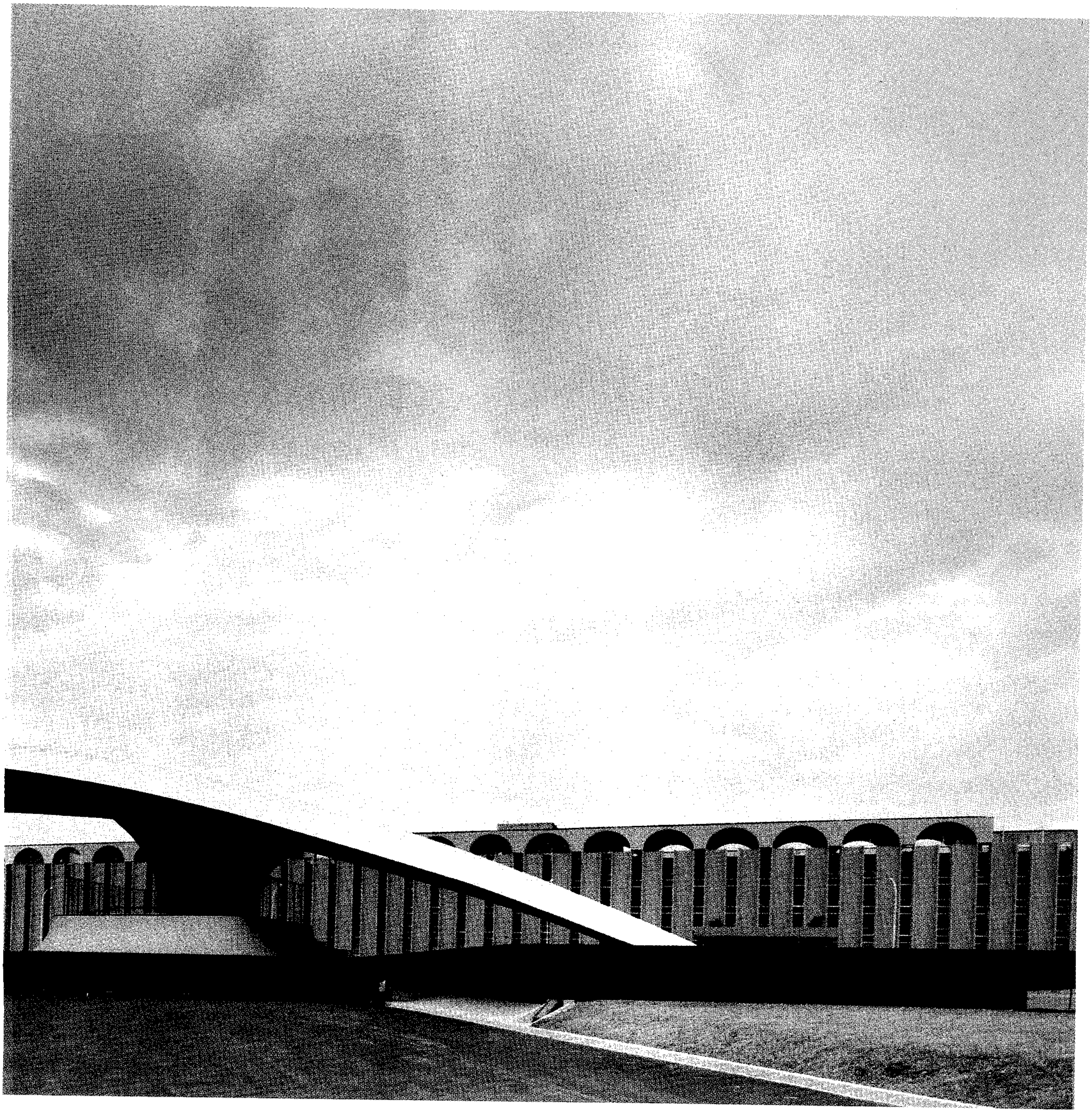


THE SKY LINE

FAR OUT

Brasília, the futuristic capital of Brazil, which sits in the middle of nowhere, has become a retro icon.

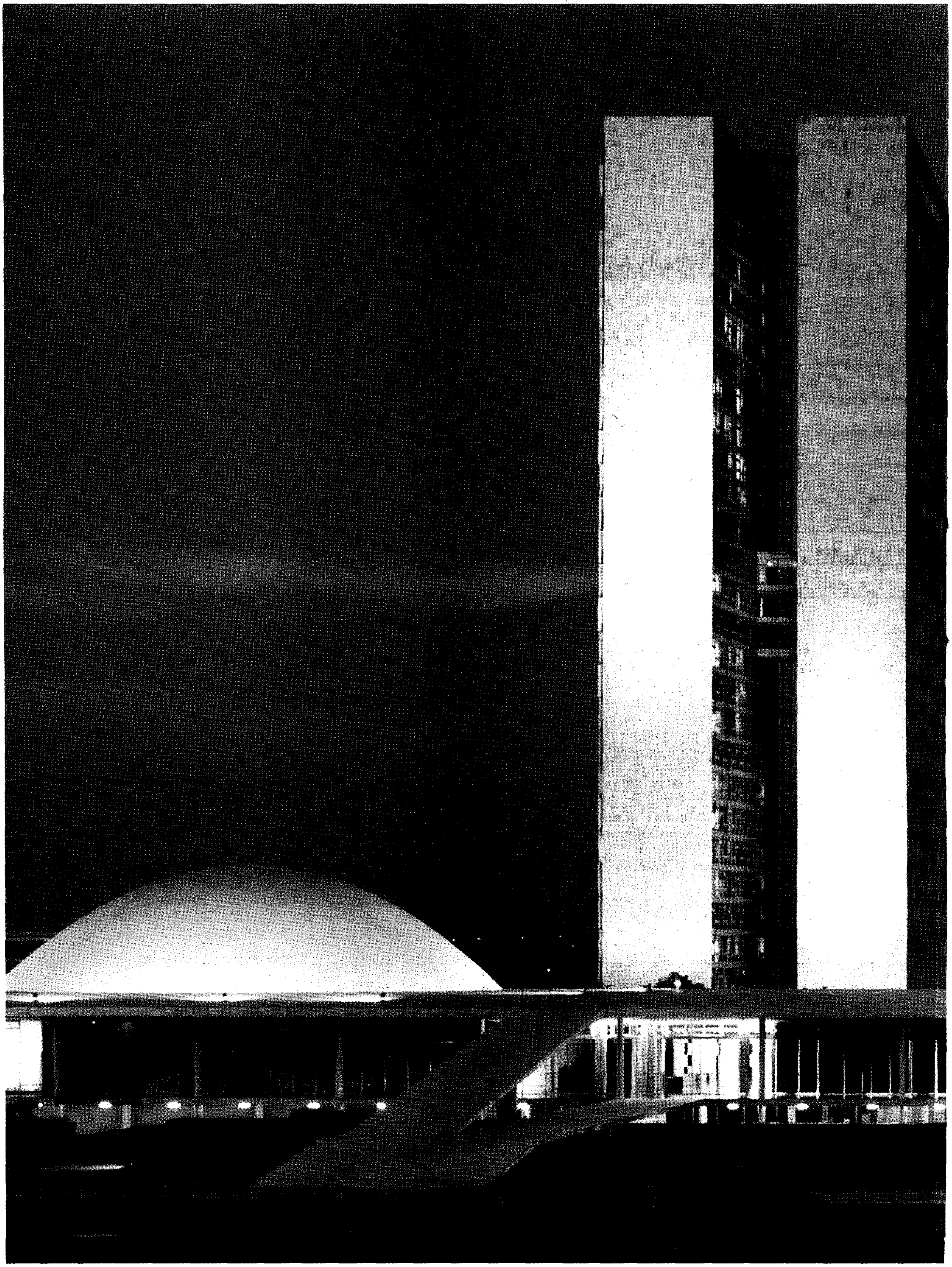
BY PAUL GOLDBERGER / PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT POLIDORI



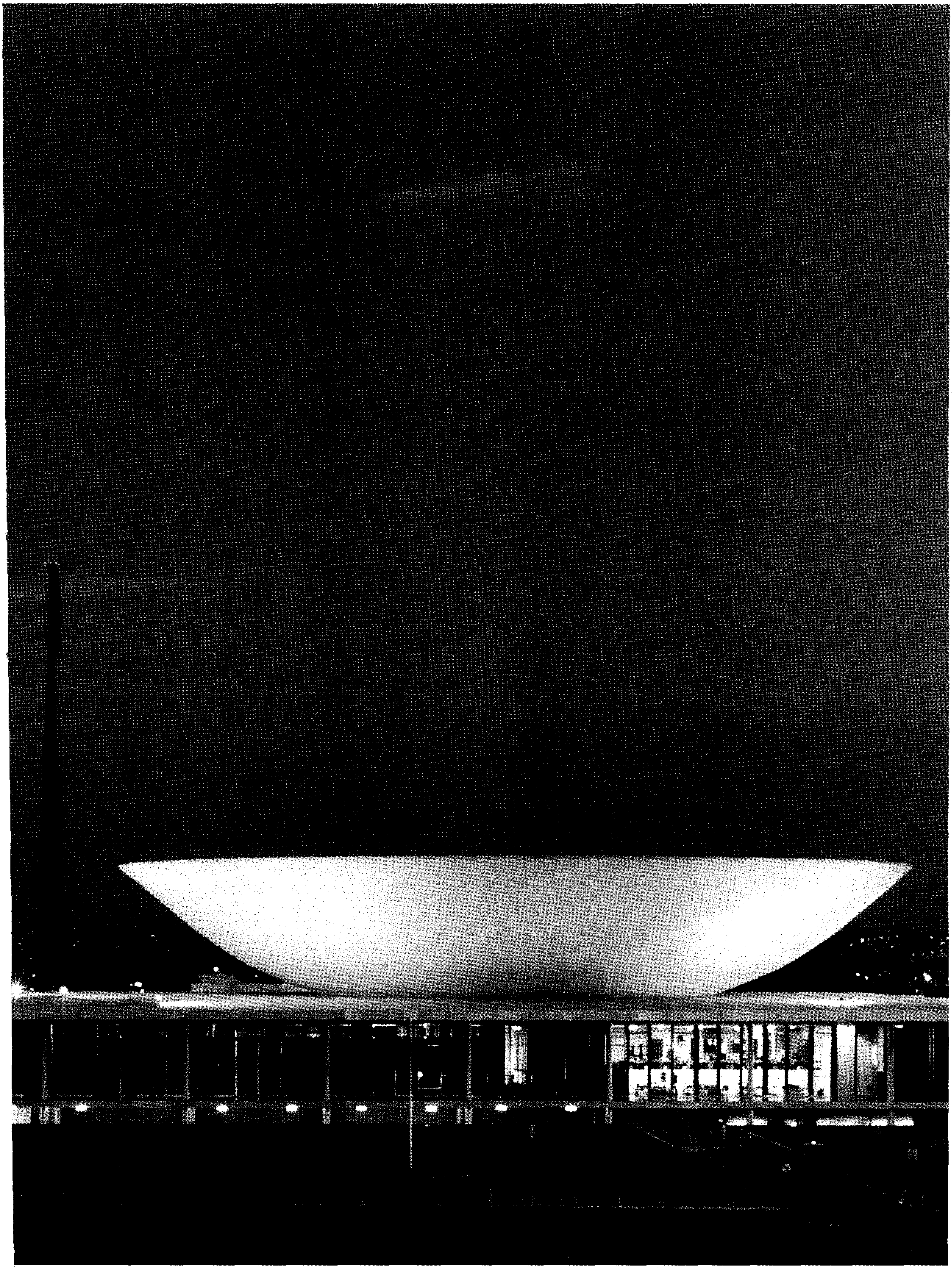
BRASÍLIA, the vast modernist city in the center of Brazil, embodies, more brazenly than anything ever built in the United States, the determined faith of the fifties that modern design could make the world better. With modernism's socialist dreams long discarded and Brazil's economy on the rocks, the city seems like an eerie remnant of utopian ideals, although it isn't the empty place that critics of the period feared it would be. Brasília and its suburbs house 1.8 million people, more than three times what was originally projected. Since the city was built as the nation's capital, government jobs keep the population employed, even though Brasília is hundreds of miles from the economic centers on the coast.

Two of Brazil's most eminent architects, Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, were hired to design Brasília—Costa to lay out the urban plan and Niemeyer to design the major buildings. Both men were influenced by Le Corbusier, and Brasília gave them a chance to create their own version of one of Le Corbusier's most visionary schemes—Ville Radieuse, a city of uniform towers sitting in open space. Never mind that such Gallic rationalism was at odds with the lush sensuality of Brazil. Away went narrow streets, the random hustle-bustle

Brasília's military headquarters is set off by a rolling arch of concrete and a slender tower, abstractions worthy of a world's fair.



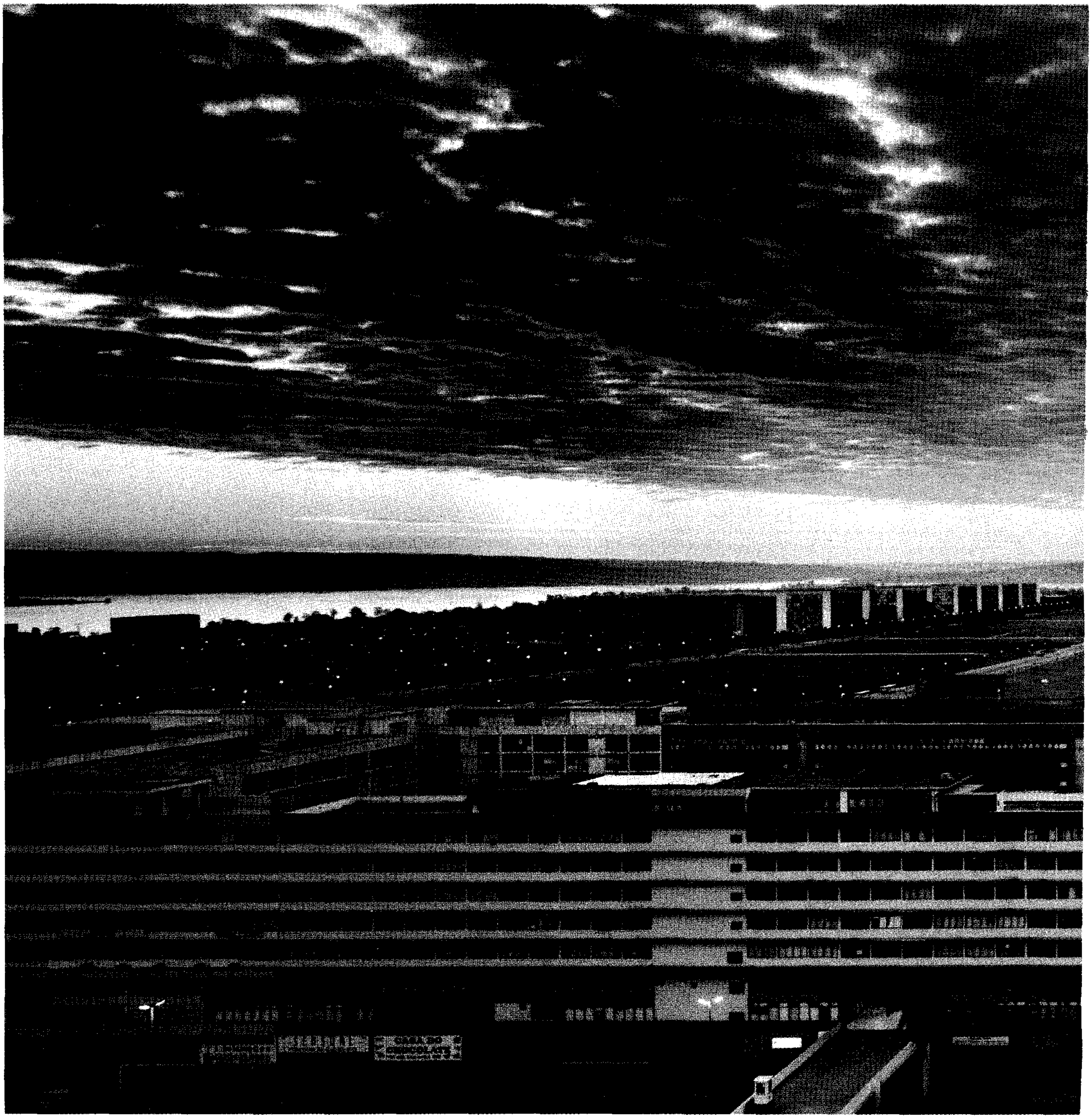
The modernist, geometric national-congress complex designed by Oscar Niemeyer has become the symbol of Brasília. T



ate is housed in the low dome on the left, and the larger Chamber of Deputies is in the saucerlike inverted dome.

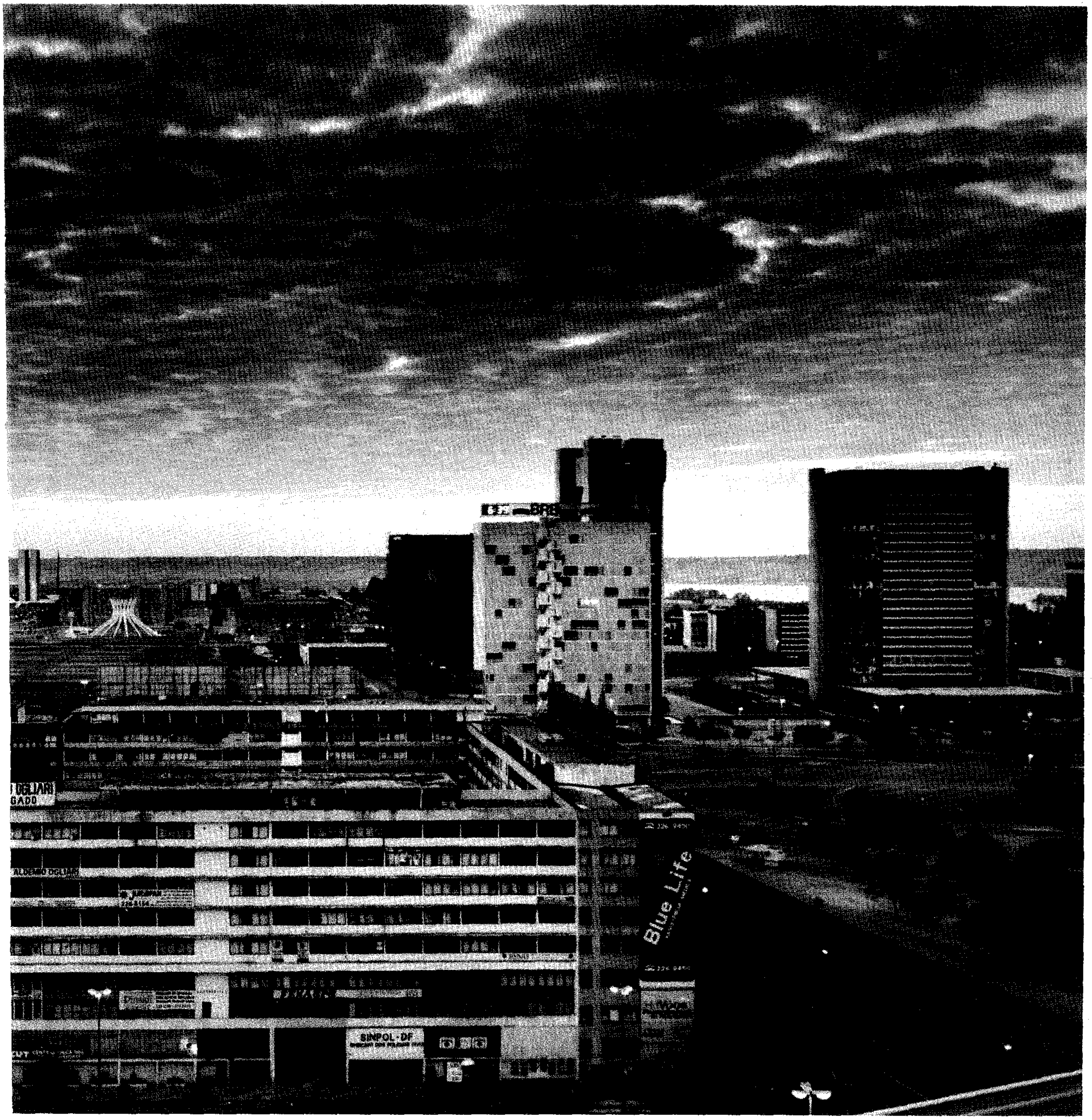
of older cities, and in came boulevards like freeways and evenly spaced, nearly identical architectural slabs. Niemeyer let himself have fun with the major government buildings, but Costa made sure that the serendipity of traditional cities was nowhere to be found. His Brasília was less a series of streets than a wide podium for Niemeyer's abstract sculpture.

Ideas like Niemeyer's and Costa's were discredited long ago. Why, then, does Brasília seem more appealing than ever? Some of the appeal is due to nostalgia. The utopian vision that gave birth to the city is so old, and so unconnected to contemporary life, that it is endearing. And the city's modern shapes are startlingly lyrical. Niemeyer, who is ninety-one and lives in Rio de Janeiro (Costa died last year, at ninety-six), is a Communist with the heart of a romantic. He has spent much of his life deploring the architect's inability to right the social inequities of the world, but he hasn't been crippled by what he sees as the limitations of his profession. In 1958, he told the International Students' Congress in Leningrad that "it is strange how the power of beauty makes us forget so much injustice," and then he went back to his drawing board in Brazil and produced not harsh Stalinist blocks but the light, swirling forms of a fantasist. Niemeyer's buildings exquisitely marry modernist geometries to romantic yearn-

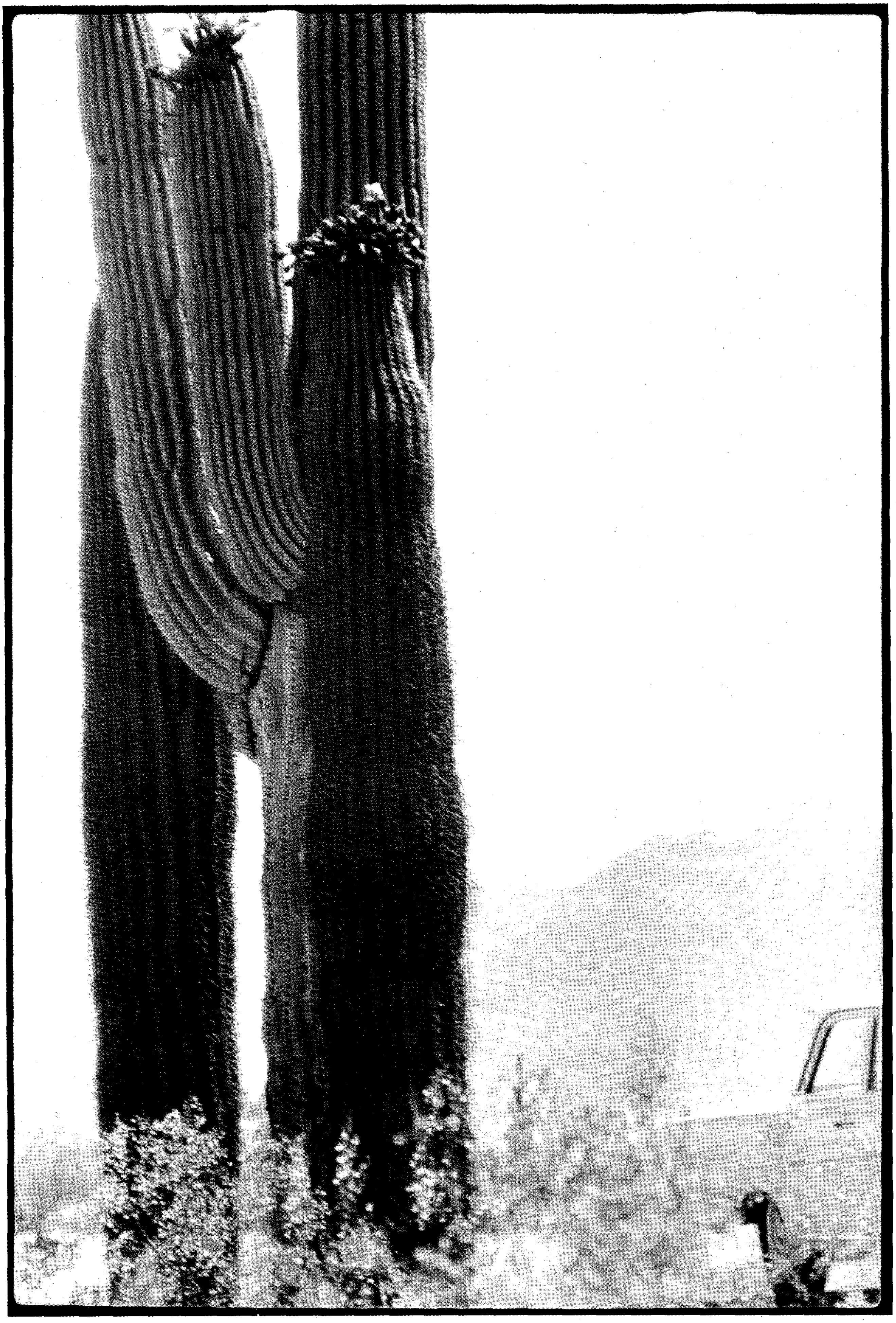


The heart of Brasília still looks much as its architects, Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, conceived it, with slabs and towers in o ing. His twin office slabs for Brazil's Secretariat snuggle right up next to each other, a ridiculous configuration that makes for extraordinary visual excitement, especially since the slabs play the low dome of the Senate off the concave bowl of the Chamber of Deputies. They make the United Nations building in New York—on which Niemeyer worked—look timid and flat by comparison. The buildings in Brasília dance. Who could not love Niemeyer's "Star Wars" Presidential Palace—a kind of Mies van der Rohe glass box surrounded by swooping, prancing cutouts—or the round cathedral with ribs that look like a crown roast of lamb, or the rolling concrete arch outside the military headquarters? Imagine that Eero Saarinen had designed the Pentagon.

Brasília doesn't function the way its designers imagined it would. Most of the life of the city takes place on the outskirts, in ordinary towns that have grown up around the edges of the precisely planned, geometrically rigorous center. The satellites lack both the patina of older cities and the panache of Niemeyer's government buildings, but they work for the people who inhabit them. Brasília proves, better than any other place, what we have known all along: that modern architecture can't make cities, although it can make some wonderful buildings. And in this case the city's allure transcends its failure. ♦



e, in the manner of Le Corbusier's theoretical Ville Radieuse. Niemeyer's cathedral is the tentlike ribbed structure in the center.



DAVID VESTAL, (1966)/ROBERT MANN GALLERY

FICTION

NOGALES

Seductions of the desert.

BY TIM O'BRIEN

KAREN BURNS is forty-one, single, sturdy, a graying redhead, bashful with men, undistinguished of face and figure. She directs a retirement community in Tucson, and today, full of hope, she leads several of her charges on a walking tour of a desert park just outside the city. They have arrived by van—Karen, five residents of Homewood Estates, and a driver named Darrell Jettie. Single file, they plod down a marked cinder trail, past wildflowers and dwarf piñons and twisted old saguaros. The day is a scorcher, but the group moves along dutifully, the men chatting about golf, the women dabbing at their foreheads as Karen reads aloud from a park brochure.

Karen is not dressed for a desert outing. She is dressed for Darrell Jettie—in black slacks, gold sandals, a black cotton blouse. Black slims her down.

For six weeks, since hiring Darrell as a part-time driver, Karen has entertained robust, minutely detailed romantic fantasies. She cannot help herself. Even now, under the desert sun, her head is cluttered with voices not quite her own. She imagines Darrell Jettie's tongue in her mouth. She imagines preparing his breakfast, honeymooning on an exotic island.

Maybe love, a voice whispers. *So do something.*

Do?

He wants you. He's watching.

Karen blushes. Still reading aloud from the brochure, she tells herself to take ten more steps, then stop, then look back at him and smile. Instantly, however, she revises this thought. Twenty-five steps, she decides. Fifty for sure.

And then she counts to herself.

At fifty, she stops and turns—bravely—but can manage only a weak, fraudulent stare.

Darrell frowns. He takes a hesitant half step.

"Problem?" he says.

Karen's heart bubbles. She shakes her head, spins around, and strides up the cinder trail.

AT noon, when the group returns to the air-conditioned van, Karen sits up front, next to Darrell, who is thirty-six, blond, excessively polite, a chain-smoker. Karen has been dreaming torrid love dreams all morning.

"Back to the ranch?" says Darrell.

"Oh, naturally, the ranch," Karen says, and tells herself not to hope.

Darrell pulls onto the highway.

He drives fast, smoking, two slender fingers hooked over the wheel. Though she does not smoke, and hates the smell, Karen has a sudden craving to put his cigarette to her lips. She nearly reaches out. *Do it,* a voice urges, but Karen folds her hands and stares up the road.

THEY arrive at Homewood Estates in time for lunch. Karen checks in at her office and then hurries to the dining room, where she takes a seat at Darrell's table. It is no surprise to find him testing his charms on Bess Hollander, a balding, partly deaf eighty-year-old. Darrell flirts with a luxurious, practiced, night-club voice, and with a boyish slant to his lips, but mostly with his eyes, which are pale blue and untroubled.

"We'll go down through Nogales," he is telling Bess. He speaks loudly, each syllable seductive. "Cross over there, head for the good times. A day trip. Kick up our heels."

Bess is enchanted. "Well, I guess we'll just *see* about that," she says. "But I'll tell you one thing: don't count any chickens, buster. It's not like I'm one of your usual two-bit floozies."

"You are so," says Darrell. "You're a tramp. Floozy from the word go."

Bess laughs at this. Her husband—Ed Hollander, age seventy-six—grunts and says, "Count me in. You chase Bess, I'll chase them hot little señoritas."

"Fair enough," says Darrell. He turns to Karen. "Ready for an adventure?"

"Adventure?"

"We're taking the van to Mexico."

A roller-coaster sensation comes into Karen's stomach. "Are we?" she says.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, then," Karen says.

It crosses her mind that Darrell has been hired as a driver, not as a tour leader, and that he ought to have cleared this with her. Still, she has already nodded. And Darrell has already reached across the table and squeezed her wrist and said, "Tomorrow morning, first thing. Wear something sexy."

A SILLY crush: Karen understands that. Even so, in her apartment that evening she tries on a number of outfits in preparation for Mexico, posing before a hallway mirror, finally settling on a navy-blue skirt and a simple gray blouse. It may be true, Karen realizes, that she is pursuing a pipe dream; it is certainly true, beyond any question, that since childhood she has had trouble separating the world of fantasy from the world of here and now. Voices, for instance. They come and go—most often male voices: an art teacher in high school; two college professors; a gynecologist who paid nightly visits to her sleep. In each case she had dropped hints, then later worked up the courage to make overtures, but the rejections had been curt and absolute and crushing. Twice she had ended up in hospitals.

But it is different this time. "Wear something sexy," Darrell had said—the words were hard and real, no delusion—and Karen chooses her underclothing carefully, with an eye for what might appeal to Darrell's masculine taste.

She puts on a black bra and black panties. She frowns at herself in the mirror.

Maybe love, she thinks.

Later, she slips into bed with the

The road becomes dirt. After twenty minutes it ends entirely. In all directions there is only wilderness.

thought that Nogales has a reputation for excess, and that excess is something she has been craving since she was a little girl.

THEY head south down Interstate 19, Darrell Jettie at the wheel, Karen beside him, four elderly residents of Homewood Estates conversing in the rear seats. The discussion is loud and lurching. Elaine Wirtz, age seventy-nine, ferociously defends the claim that she was a jaguar in an earlier life. She knows this, Elaine says, the way she knows she ate a bagel for breakfast that morning. Bess Hollander squints and cups an ear. "She was a what?

"A bagel, I think," Norma Ickles says.

"A what?"

Two rows back, Ed Hollander yells, "A jaguar! One of them fancy-antsy, rich-man cars!"

"She ate a car?" says Bess.

"She *was* a car," says Norma.

"Not a car," says Elaine Wirtz. "I was a jaguar—a cat. Like a puma."

"Well, for Chrissake!" Ed yells.

"What's a puma?" says Bess.

Darrell's eyes sweep sideways. He grins at Karen, then winks.

They cross the border at Nogales.

DARRELL bypasses the center of town, cruises down a series of streets lined with barbed wire and dusty chollas and forlorn adobe shacks. After ten minutes he turns onto a two-lane highway that winds back into the Sonoran Desert.

Karen asks where he is taking them.

"The real Mexico," says Darrell.

"Well, that's fine. But what about—you know—what happened to Nogales?"

He laughs. "Cheap booze, cheap women. Who needs it? Anyhow, I promised you an adventure, didn't I?"

"I suppose you did."

"All right, then," he says, and flashes her a polished, gorgeous grin. "So take it easy. Let that pretty hair down."

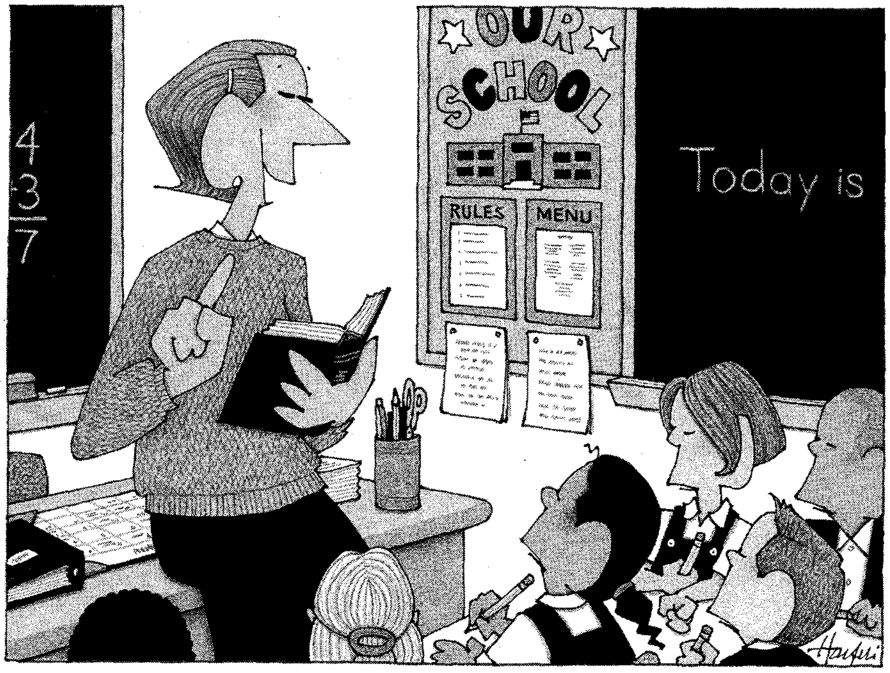
Twenty minutes later Darrell pulls in at a truck stop. The day is hot and dry. They troop inside, order coffee, sit around a table discussing their plans for the day. No one seems perplexed by the absence of any clear destination, or by the fact that they are well beyond the world of turquoise bracelets and straw sombreros. Bess and Elaine and Norma review their shopping plans. Ed talks about finding a bullfight. "Bloody beef," he says slyly, knowing this will cause controversy. And it instantly does. Elaine glares at him and says, "No bullfights. This gal, for one, doesn't go in for molesting innocent animals."

"Because she used to *be* one," Norma says.

"A puma," says Bess.

"I certainly was not," Elaine says hotly. "I was a goddam jaguar."

Karen waves a hand and threatens to turn back to Tucson. At the same instant, however, she detects movement against her knee. Darrell smiles at her. His hand has slipped beneath her navy-blue skirt; it glides upward a few inches, pauses at mid-thigh. Karen freezes. By reflex, she repeats herself. "Turn back," she says, but without conviction, and Darrell laughs and says, "Hey, we're having a ball, aren't we?"



"If Heather has two mommies, and each of them has two brothers, and one of those brothers has another man for a 'roommate,' how many uncles does Heather have?"

"Well, yes."

"So there."

His hand remains on her thigh, steady, not moving at all. His smile, too, is steady—mild and well mannered. "Let's finish our coffee, ma'am, then hit the road. Don't forget that big adventure we were talking about."

Karen cannot wholly comprehend what is happening. She feels giddy. She also feels terrified. She has not been touched this way since the night of her sixteenth birthday.

FOR almost an hour Darrell drives straight south, through rugged, repetitive desert, then he turns onto a narrow gravel road that wanders past abandoned houses and miles of sagebrush. Off to the left, both close and far away, is a range of purply-black mountains. The rest is raw desert. There are no towns. There are no road signs or people. They have not passed another vehicle in many miles, nor a single living creature, but Karen is not thinking about this. She is thinking about the truck stop and the feel of Darrell's hand beneath her skirt. The terror is gone now; she wishes he would do it again.

She fusses with her hair, listening to the hum of the air-conditioner, trying to dredge up something worth saying to him. Nothing coy. Just a subtle hint that under the right circumstances she would be prepared to accept his touch again. If it were possible—if she were another woman—she would find a way to let him know how savage she is, how female, how she would claw and bite and wrap herself around him and keep him prisoner forever, make him feel everything she felt, make him crazy with desire and hurt.

In the back seats, Norma Ickles and Ed Hollander are arguing about the meaning of the word "mesa." Neither of them has trouble saying the most idiotic things, which gives Karen the courage to clear her throat. She will count to seven, she decides, and then speak.

She counts to fifty, starts over, then says, "Darrell, you're an excellent driver."

His forehead wrinkles up. For an instant he seems bewildered, or apprehensive, but then he nods and says, "Well, sure, I've had experience. Drove all the way across the country six, maybe seven different times." He grins at this. "Guess I like to watch the miles go by. I like to roam."

"Roam?" she says.

"Anywhere. Everywhere."

"Well, you drive perfectly," says Karen. "And I mean that."

Stupidly, she can think of nothing else to say, her head as empty as the desert, but apparently Darrell has not taken notice. He is deep in thought. He has forgotten, it seems, that not an hour ago his hand had slipped beneath her navy-blue skirt.

"What you've got to do," he tells her, "is try not to worry about every little dip and curve, just keep your eyes pointed way up ahead." He flicks a cool smile at her. "Like relationships, I guess. You don't drive the road, you let the road drive you. Go with the rush of things."

"Interesting," Karen says. She risks a giggle. She has no idea what any of this means. For a few seconds she considers how to explore the issue. "So then," she says. "Where does the rush take us?"

"Sorry, ma'am?"

"Where does it go? This road we're on."

Darrell rolls his shoulders. Slowly, as if his tongue has gone heavy, he says, "I figure it'll take us exactly where it wants."

"No, I meant—"

"A shortcut," he says. "Ten or fifteen more miles, we're there."

Then again, for no obvious reason, he shrugs. With one hand he opens a fresh pack of cigarettes. He glances into the rearview mirror, frowns, taps out a cigarette, lights it, and says out of nowhere, "I don't plan to hurt anybody."

Karen is not sure she heard him correctly. "Well, I don't really . . . I don't understand."

"Nothing to understand."

"You said hurt."

"I did, didn't I?" He turns up the air-conditioning. "It was real nice of you to hire me, ma'am. Super nice. I'm grateful for that."

In the back seats, Bess and Elaine and Norma are commenting on the desert scenery unfolding before them, how vast it is, how unspoiled. For a few moments Karen listens to their muffled chitchat, as if overhearing voices in a dream, catching only meaningless bits and pieces.

"Hurt how?" she says.

Darrell pats her arm as if she were a child. "Men, I mean. From what I can tell, you don't have a whole lot of experience."

Karen nods. She is suddenly conscious of her black underwear.

"I guess that's right," she says.

"Can't mess with that. It wouldn't be proper."

"But what if . . ." She loses her breath, begins again. An angry little hiss goes through her thoughts. "What if it doesn't matter to me?"

"Doesn't matter?"

"Experience with men. I can imagine, can't I?"

Darrell laughs.

"Apparently so," he says.

THE road becomes dirt. After twenty minutes it ends entirely. In all directions there is only wilderness.

They bump along for another two hundred yards before Darrell pulls up alongside an old red pickup truck. For a few seconds it appears that the truck is empty; then the passenger-side door swings open and a young man in coveralls and a white baseball cap emerges. His face is sunburned, his left cheek discolored by a birthmark. He strolls over to the van, leans forward to speak with Darrell. The young man looks to be in his mid-twenties, slim and blue-eyed, and except for the birthmark he could pass for Darrell's twin brother.

Darrell opens his door, gets out, follows the young man over to the red pickup.

In the back seat, Bess says, "What's this?"

"Not good," says Ed.

THEY sit now in the bed of the truck—Karen, Bess, Ed, Norma, and Elaine. It is early afternoon. Darrell and the young man have removed portions of the van's floor carpeting, and Darrell is bending down with a screwdriver, muttering to himself, his expression intent. Karen has no idea what he is doing. Now and then the young man seems to offer suggestions, which Darrell shrugs off. Plainly, both of them are becoming agitated. At one point Darrell's screwdriver slips, and he jerks back and curses—a pair of shocking mismatched nouns.

Elaine Wirtz makes a noise in her throat. "Well," she says, and glares at Karen. "You hired this monster."

"Very polite, though," says Norma Ickles.

"Crap," Elaine snaps. "Don't you

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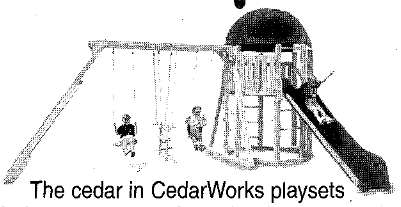

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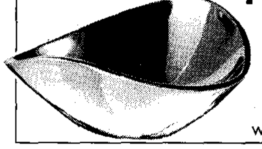

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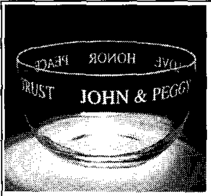

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get it? They intend to murder us."

Bess leans forward and says, "They what?"

"Murder!" Elaine yells.

"Murder who?"

"Jesus Christ," Ed mutters.

Karen is numb, barely listening. She watches Darrell go back to work with his screwdriver. He is on the floor of the van, directly behind the driver's seat, and Karen cannot help noticing that his shirt has slipped up to expose a flat, tanned belly. She is afraid, yes, but she is also spellbound. He reminds her of a boy she had adored back in high school—a boy who used to smile at her in the cafeteria, who once drew graphic, exhilarating pictures in a book she had dropped, but who in the end was simply too shy to respond to the many, many love letters she had placed in his locker. True, that affair of the heart had gone nowhere; it was sterile and one-sided; the boy had almost suffocated her in the back seat of a car on the night of her sixteenth birthday, almost broken her in half, and then he'd dropped her off at a Dairy Queen and stared at the steering wheel and asked if she would mind walking home. But now, at least for a moment, Karen finds herself contemplating a happy ending. Darrell will explain that there is nothing to worry about, that in fact he wishes to marry her and tear away her black underwear and do all the bestial things she has read about in magazines, back-seat things, gynecologist things, all those things she herself so desperately wants to do to him, but also doesn't want to do, never again, or only on her wedding night, only on an exotic island with soft winds and flower smells.

At the same time, of course, Karen knows better. She has always known.

Yet knowledge does not puncture hope.

Despite herself, she feels an expectant tremor when Darrell slides out of the van. He tucks in his shirt, speaks briefly with his young friend, and then the two of them stroll toward the pickup.

Elaine Wirtz stiffens. She nudges Bess and says, "Murder time."

"Well, for God's sake, *do* something," says Norma.

"Me?" Elaine says. "I'm seventy-nine."

They glance over at Ed, who makes a lazy, indifferent motion with his shoulders. He tells them to quiet down.

"But you're the man," says Norma.

"Old man," he says. "And not stupid."

"Well, personally," says Bess, "I'm getting thirsty. Not to mention you-know-what." She pauses dramatically, lifts her eyebrows. "I'm a lady, aren't I? I do need conveniences."

Even now Karen cannot purge herself of hope. She looks for some reassuring sign from Darrell—a smile, maybe, or a bashful bit of eye contact—but instead he leans down and removes six yellow shoeboxes from the cab of the pickup. He passes the boxes to his young friend, who carries them over to the van.

There is a moment of dusty silence, then Elaine Wirtz pushes to her feet.

"Enough!" she yells.

Darrell grins at her. "Easy now."

"No, I've had my fill. What's happening here?"

"Smuggling," Ed says.

"You're kidding," says Bess. "They're smuggling shoes?"

"Drugs!" Ed shouts.

Bess glances at her husband, issues a look of warning. "There is no reason," she says, "to raise one's voice."

Darrell stands in the bright sunlight, the corners of his lips seeming to teeter on the edge of a smile. When he looks up at Karen, there is the softness of apology in his eyes. And something else, too. A kind of longing: she is sure of it.

As if to confirm this, Darrell shifts from foot to foot. He cannot hold her gaze.

"Twenty more minutes," he says politely, "then we'll pile in the van and have ourselves a nice happy ride back to the border. Cross over and we're home free."

Elaine releases a mocking laugh. "Except you've forgotten the murder part."

"Sorry, ma'am. No murders."

"What a liar."

"No, I doubt it," Ed says. "He needs us, don't you see? Bunch of old codgers—makes it easy at customs." He peers at Darrell for a moment. "Am I right?"

"Yes, sir. Just so everybody behaves."

Once again his shrewd blue eyes brush across the surface of Karen's face.

She straightens her posture.

It is ridiculous, of course, but she is struck by an urge to tell him about her sexy black underclothing, about the smooth, dusty aftertaste of a Dairy Queen cone on the night of her sixteenth birthday.

DARRELL is at the wheel again, Karen beside him, the young man sitting in back with the others.

As they approach Nogales, Darrell turns off the radio.

"Attention, all hands," he says. He slows down, smiles at Karen. "Everybody listen up real good. When we hit the border, I want this whole crew to act super-duper normal. No nonsense, no funny faces." He chuckles. His voice is courteous and uninflected. "Hands in your laps, pretend you're in church. Anybody asks questions, we're just a happy gang of tourists. Am I understood?"

"Or else what?" says Elaine.

Darrell shrugs.

He stares straight up the road and says, "Or else I shoot you in the titties."

THE crossing is a thrill. Darrell has taken Karen by the hand. He holds it gently, comfortably, humming under his breath while a border guard examines their passports. The guard peers into the van, waves them through. It is like pausing at a stoplight.

A quarter mile up the road Darrell pulls his hand away.

"Easy as pie," he says. "Exactly like I promised. Adventure of a lifetime, right? And I bet you'll be talking about it for years. You and your pals, over cups of hot Geritol."

"I suppose so," Karen murmurs.

She is thinking about his hand, how his fingers had interlocked with hers, how he had volunteered a firm, encouraging squeeze when the guard leaned down to ask for the passports. She craves more. She wants him to take her hand on a beach somewhere, and in bed, and at breakfast, and wherever else the opportunity might come.

For a few moments she floats in fantasy. Then something happens in her head: a tiny explosion.

She reaches out toward Darrell.

Without volition—without so much as counting to herself—she pries his right hand from the wheel and takes it to her lap and holds it tight. Darrell mutters something. He tries to tug away, but even then Karen hangs on. She has appropriated a luckier woman's life. She is a fashion model, a temptress, a housewife. She is on her honeymoon. She is aware of the hum of the tires against the road, the heat of a lover's hand.

After a second Darrell releases the wheel. He strikes her on the forehead with his free fist.

"Holy shit," he says.

FORTY minutes out of Tucson, Darrell pulls off onto a side road. He drives west into the desert for several miles, through barren alkali flats, then halts at the edge of a dry creek bed. He steps out and invites the others to join him.

"Last stop," he says brightly.

He helps Bess from the van, escorts her down into the gully. Single file, Karen and Norma and Elaine and Ed follow along. It is late afternoon. A light wind has come up. To the east there is a darkening stain of night in the sky.

Darrell's young friend gives Elaine a nudge and motions toward a large, flat boulder. "Sit," he says, "and don't flap those old-bitch lips of yours."

Elaine glares and sits.

Bess and Norma and Ed settle down beside her.

A few feet away, Karen waits for dispensation. The wind nips at her navy-blue skirt. She looks at Darrell, whose lovely blue eyes have no focus. "Come on, now," he says quietly. "Take a load off."

His friend chuckles. "Big, big load. You should've fucked her."

Darrell shakes his head and says, "Cut it out. Karen's my doll. My sweetie pie."

The two of them climb out of the gully.

They talk in low tones, put on identical nylon jackets, get into the van, drive away.

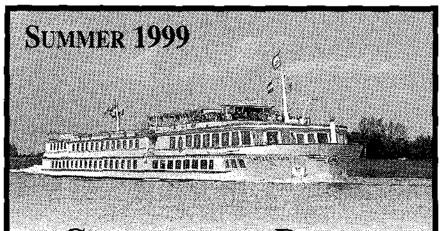
Already the day is cooling. In twenty minutes it will be dark. As she watches the van grow smaller, disappearing in its own rising dust, it occurs to Karen that she has been here before, or in a place very much like it. She sits down. At the roof of her mouth she feels a little bud of thirst. Soon it will be all she knows, all she is, but for the present Karen slides into the fantasy that Darrell Jettie will return to take her away. She has waited a long while. She can wait a bit longer.

"I'll tell you this much," says Bess Hollander. "I'm totally pooped. Boy oh boy."

"At least they didn't murder us," Norma says.

"Oh, they did," says Elaine.

But Karen Burns is beyond this. She is contemplating a pretty old house in New Hampshire, breakfasts with Darrell, the lace curtains in her kitchen, balmy nights, how she will suffocate him in his sleep with all her love. ♦



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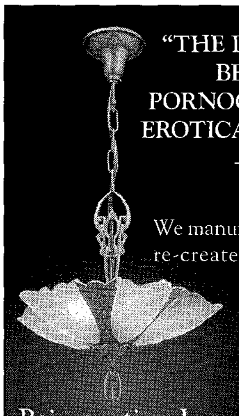

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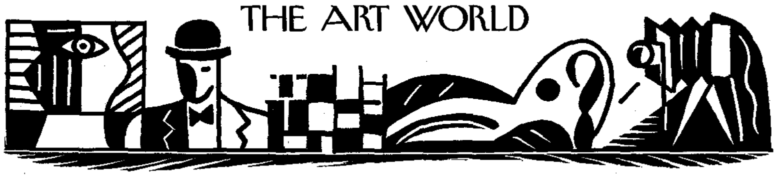


THE FRENCH DISCONNECTION

Max Beckmann takes on Matisse and Picasso.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

“Ah, a great painter,” Pablo Picasso remarked of Max Beckmann in 1964. That “Ah”—a sound of sleepy memory bestirring itself—says a lot about Beckmann’s place in modern art. The place is left field, where remote associations roam. Beckmann truly is great, as most art lovers take for granted—but great in relation to what? The vehement German, who dropped dead on the corner of Sixty-first Street and Central Park West in 1950, at the age of sixty-six, still awaits an appropriately plumped and fitted reputation. He may never have one.

“Max Beckmann and Paris”—a smashing exhibition at the Saint Louis Art Museum that mingles Beckmann paintings, mainly from the nineteen-twenties and thirties, with works by masters of the School of Paris—gets one thinking about art-cultural politics in the twentieth century. People regularly decry fashion in contemporary art. How about fashion of the hallowed past which, infecting the judgments of subsequent generations, becomes standard opinion? There is a word for the process: history—the normalizing of stories that beat out other stories. It is always bunk, to some extent.

When you are in the mood for him, Beckmann can look like the best modern painter in an alternate universe—a place not ruled by the Francophile cosmology that became American holy writ by way of the Museum of Modern Art during the century’s decisive decades. Beckmann himself was always in such a mood. Sulfurously competitive, he tried in the late nineteen-twenties and early thirties to storm the international big time in Paris, even Frenchifying his style to invite direct comparisons with the reigning gods. He failed miserably—and unjustly.

The St. Louis show (it began at the Kunsthaus Zürich last year and will not travel, after its closing, on May 9th) presents fifty-three paintings by Beckmann, ten by Picasso, eight by Henri Matisse, and lesser numbers by Fernand Léger, Georges Rouault, and Georges Braque. A big, lone Robert Delaunay—“The Cardiff Team” (1912-13), which is a giddy congeries of rugby players, a Ferris wheel, billboards, and an airplane—is flanked by two Beckmanns on similarly modernity-drunk and athletic themes (carnival balloonists, a soccer match). The startling linkage of the effervescent Frenchman and the acrid German is a new thought for art history. It is one of many such surprises on this occasion which shake up our habituated notion of Beckmann as a Teutonic mystagogue of smoky, myth-ridden, dirty-sexy grotesquerie.

The show’s curators—Tobia Bezzola and Cornelia Homburg—wrestle with the question of how German Beckmann was. Their answer: less thoroughly than you might think. It has been this artist’s fate to hang in most museums amid German art’s local heroes—the Expressionists. But Beckmann’s frame of reference always eclipsed theirs. Though keyed to non-French influences, including Edvard Munch and Lovis Corinth, Beckmann’s aim was a grand style descended (like Fauvism and Cubism) from Cézanne, van Gogh, and the other Post-Impressionist pioneers. Now, in Missouri, the case of his ambition has been taken up at last.

Beckmann and St. Louis: a romance. After hunkering down in Amsterdam during the Second World War, the artist and his wife, Mathilde (Quappi) Kaulbach, came to St. Louis, where Beckmann had accepted a teaching position at Washington University. Beckmann wrote in his diary, “St. Louis. Trees at last, ground under my feet at last. . . . Here it will be possible to live again.” Today—thanks largely to the collecting instincts of the department-store magnate Morton D. May—the splendid Saint Louis Art Museum is unusually rich in German modern art, and it boasts the world’s most important concentration of works by Beckmann. But the artist had set his highest hopes on quite another city.

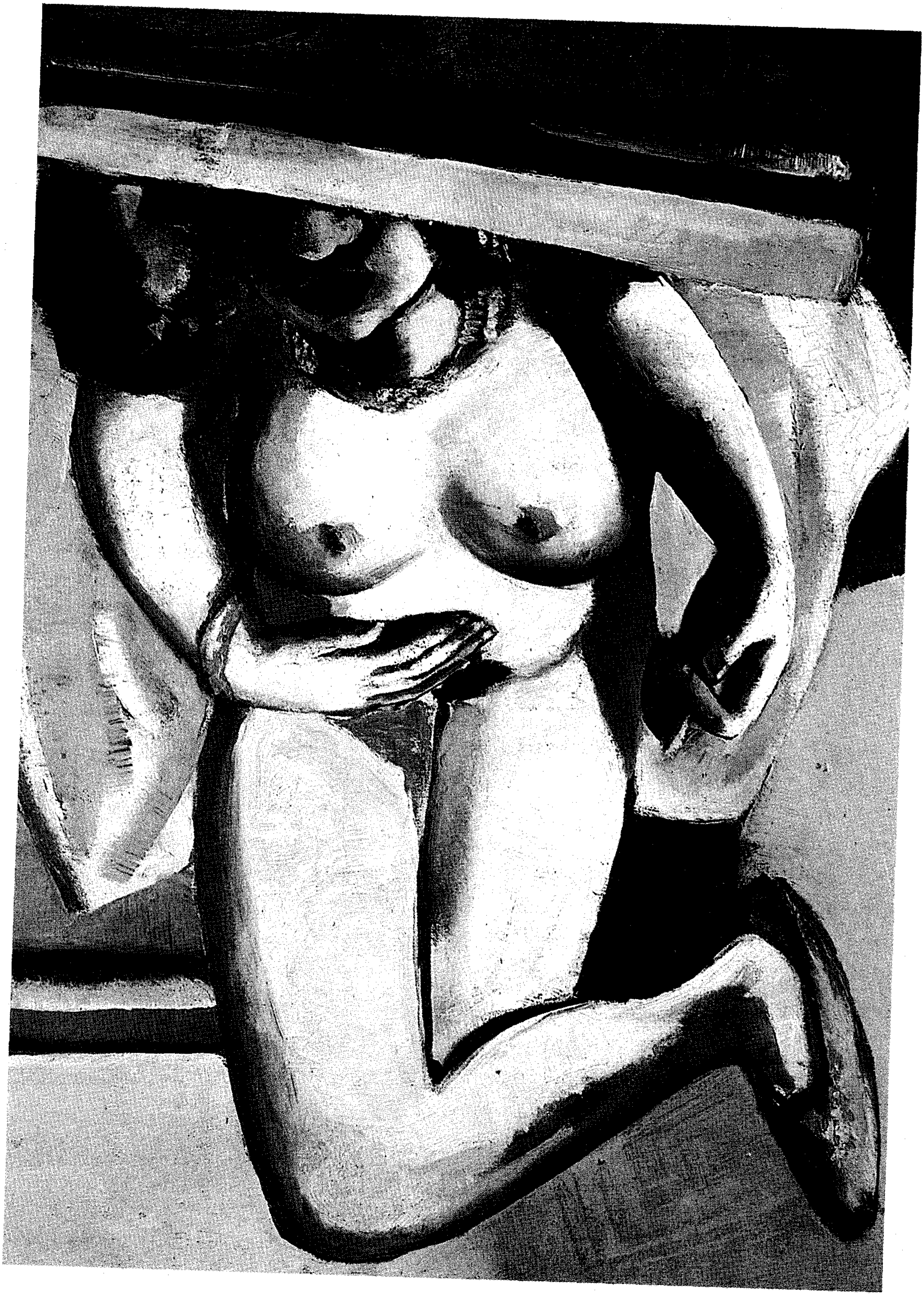
In the summer of 1925, Beckmann and his Berlin dealer, Israel Ber Neumann, met often at the Hotel California, in Paris. They talked career strategy. Already the biggest fish in the modest, determinedly brackish pond of Weimar painting, Beckmann wanted to swim with whales. He didn’t care to meet Picasso et al. in person, and he never did meet them. (A feverish youthful attempt to make the Paris scene in 1903-04 had left him humiliated.) The boulder-headed master, a champagne bohemian, craved universal glory. Neumann was supposed to help. The campaign sputtered along vainly for years, until world events called it off.

As is detailed in this show’s meaty catalogue, the effort makes for a poignant tale. Beckmann’s Right Bank game plan ignored the Paris avant-garde, which was Surrealist, in favor of high-society and diplomatic connections—a strategy that was sure to alienate any art scene’s most crucial audience, the young. Countering the bad odor in France of all things German, Beckmann had himself touted as “European,” whatever that meant. In the studio, he suspended his strong suit of glowering allegory in deference to French formalism. Still, he made stunning pictures. Saddest in this show’s tacit portrait of an era is the sense of Parisian cosmopolitanism succumbing to sclerosis—an arrogantly closed club, disdaining fresh blood.

Beckmann’s eruptive style vivifies, by pointed contrast, School of Paris aesthetics, which were beginning to seem a little pat. The German challenged the prodigious decorative unities of Parisian picture-making with an abrupt theatrical dynamic: paintings whose every detail fulminates in pressurized, stagelike spaces. Beckmann starts with such a space and then—with each grunting stroke and lividly cold, light-over-dark color effect—muscles things forward to a surface that practically bursts, spilling a world into our laps.

French-type painting begins and

Beckmann’s “Female Nude with Dog” (1927): An all-out challenge to the decorative unities of Parisian picture-making.



ends with the wholeness of a taut surface. This approach had characterized Watteau and Chardin, and it went double for Picasso and Matisse. By means of line, shading, and color, depth illusions are built or carved out parsimoniously, making each nudge into the third dimension a piquant, potentially dramatic event. (Cézanne showed how to bring about a tiny climax with just about every brushstroke.) Beckmann clearly recognized this sensibility—and was exasperated by it. He strove to turn it inside out. His flatly worked surfaces respond at all points to a given sense of deep pictorial space, which, beyond being imaginary, advertises Imagination.

HERE'S my scorecard on the St. Louis show: Beckmann wasn't as good as Picasso or Matisse, but the proximate goad of his work makes theirs sweat a bit, very instructively. He was better than Léger, whose status as the tough guy of post-Cubist painting can't withstand the German's force. Beckmann wasn't a painter's painter, like Braque, but, plainly, he could have been, had his ambition been less sprawling. As for Rouault, a brotherly palaver emerges between his work and Beckmann's, surprising me with the thought that the hermetic Frenchman is sorely underrated and merits major reconsideration.

Beckmann, like Rouault and the Expressionists of his own homeland, was emotionally committed to subject matter in ways that clanged against armored Parisian art for art's sake. Of course, Picasso is emotional, too, but only on grounds that have already been Picassoized. In one of this show's several dazzling juxtapositions, the lasciviously caressed, yielding mass of a 1932 Picasso nude hangs beside the violently swelling fullness of a 1930 Beckmann nude. Beckmann celebrates female fecundity and tacitly brags that he is equal to it. Picasso never brags. He is Mister Man. He utterly dominates the female in all things, all the time.

Unable to overpower Beckmann, Picasso trumps him with nuance. Beckmann's emotive range is limited to attitudes befitting his rather rigid persona. (He was a thundering dandy, if you will.) Nothing limits Picasso. Another showdown sets Beckmann's "Large Still Life with Fish" (1927) against Picasso's "Still Life with Fish" (1940). At first blush, the German's composition, in ferocious red and black, outfaces the Spaniard's dyspeptically wan eels, crab, and whatnot. But soon the Picasso's very pallor insinuates a heartstopping unease—a sinister mystery of writhing things which makes mere fresh seafood of the Beckmann.

As for Matisse, why do people keep quoting his playful remark about wanting his art to be like an armchair, as if it explained something? If I think of a chair while viewing Matisse—his swimmingly ambiguous "Still Life with Green Sideboard" (1928), in St. Louis, say—it's because I would like to sit down, and not hurt myself by fainting from a dizzy surfeit of pleasure. When painting from life, Beckmann responds enthusiastically to sensuous appearances and conveys his excitement. Matisse gets quietly drunk on visual seduction and induces in viewers a contact high. Matisse can make you hate your life for its comparatively insipid joys.

Beckmann is less delightful but more invigorating. His art is about life's stubborn difficulties, which he lays into with relish. He exalts energy that is available to everyone. If you are a man and have a new wife, you may be quite as crazy about her as Beckmann was about Quappi, whom he married in 1925. "Quappi in Blue" (1926) invests a slight, pretty young woman with fire-alarm intensity—an effect of dense, flavorsome colors crossed with fierce tonal contrasts. In Quappi's bone-white face, her red lips assume a sweetly wry expression while visually exploding like a grenade.

Wanting only to be a hero of art, Beckmann got shunted into being a hero of other things. After the Second World War, Alfred Barr, at MOMA, hung Beckmann's mighty triptych "Departure" (1932-35) with Picasso's "Guernica" (1937). It was a handsome gesture, whose political point was a tribute to Nazi-suppressed German genius. Sentimental in a good way, the bracketing with Picasso evoked "Europe" as an embattled ideal. But it was not about art criticism. Beckmann was being leapfrogged from marginal and provincial to established-master status, without having passed through an interim stage of give-and-take contrast and comparison. Among things to regret about the twentieth century, Beckmann's debacle in Paris is pretty trivial, but this wonderful show in St. Louis makes it sting. ♦

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

REVOLUTIONARY RAG

How Irving Berlin's joyous impertinence changed American music.

BY JOHN LAHR

At Woodlawn Cemetery, in the Bronx, there is a small American flag staked in the greensward above Irving Berlin's gravestone. A flag in this setting usually signifies war dead, but Berlin, who died in 1989, at the age of a hundred and one, was not a soldier. His work—eight hundred and ninety-nine copyrighted songs—was another kind of service to his country. In his slangy, syncopated vivaciousness, the songwriter, who changed his name from Israel Baline when his first song, "Marie from Sunny Italy," was published, in 1907, hymned the joys of the modern republic: the manners, the fashions, and the expectations of the masses from whom he'd emerged, having arrived from Siberia in 1893, at the age of five. "I'm writing American music," Berlin boasted in 1915, after "Alexander's Ragtime Band," which had taken him eighteen minutes to write, became the biggest-selling song in the history of the music industry up to that time; it sold a million copies in seven months in 1911, and helped its wunderkind composer, at twenty-one, earn a hundred thousand dollars after just three years at his craft. Berlin went on to say, "The reason American composers have done nothing highly significant is because they won't write American music. . . . So they write imitation European music which doesn't mean anything."

Berlin's jaunty songs caught the impertinence of the New World. As early as 1913, according to Laurence Bergreen's 1990 biography of him, they were honored at a Friars' Club roast by his mentor, the great Broadway showman George M. Cohan, as "music you don't have to dress up to listen to." With "Watch Your Step" (1914), billed as a "ragtime opera," Berlin was the first composer to straddle Tin Pan Alley and Broadway, and he was the only one ever to have a Broadway theatre—the Music Box—built solely to perform his work. His best effort, "Annie Get Your Gun" (1946), is being revived on Broadway this month, with Bernadette Peters as the sassy sharpshooter Annie Oakley. The show produced eight standards—more than any other Broadway musical in history.

Over his lifetime, Berlin had four hundred and fifty-one hit songs; two hundred and eighty-two of them were in the Top Ten, and thirty-five made it to No. 1. Until the twenties, when peo-

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The songwriter with Ethel Merman, the original Annie Oakley, in 1953. It took Berlin only two months to compose the score of "Annie Get Your Gun," which was his entry into the postwar fascination with the folkloric.

ple spoke of "jazz" they were more than likely speaking of ragtime, which Berlin was largely responsible for popularizing. He wrote lyrics as well as music, and the opening of "Alexander's Ragtime Band"—"Come on and hear! Come on and hear!"—was, like many of his early hits ("Everybody's Doin' It Now," "Call Me Up Some Rainy Afternoon"), an invitation to act, to taste the liberty of a society increasingly on the move. As Ian Whitcomb notes, in "Irving Berlin and Ragtime America," sometimes even a single word—like "Hurrah!" in Berlin's hit "My Wife Has Gone to the Country (Hurrah! Hurrah!)"—worked the same trick. "That lone word gave the whole idea of the song in one quick wallop," Berlin said. "It invited the roomful to join in the hilarious shout."

Since Berlin had risen from the masses, he understood the masses, and wanted a mass communication. "The mob is always right," he once told the *Times*. "There are darned few good songs which have not been whistled or sung by the crowd." Between 1900—the year Berlin's father, a cantor in the Old World and a poultry inspector in the New World, died—and 1910, nine million immigrants came to America. Berlin's lyric gift was forged in this new racial crucible; his early catalogue included songs called "Oh, How That German Could Love," "Colored Romeo," and "Latins Know How."

"The real American has not yet arrived," a character in Israel Zangwill's 1908 hit play, "The Melting Pot," said. "He will be the fusion of all races." Popular song was the first expression of this fusion: by bringing the culture of outsiders—the spice of their voices and their music—into the mainstream, song served as a powerful agent and chronicler of change. In a time before radio, when only a few of the nation's newspapers crossed state lines, Berlin's songs were everywhere, corrupting listeners with the pleasure of ethnic idiom and stories—Yiddle with his Fiddle, Alexander with his Band, and the nice Jewish girl in "Sadie Salome, Go Home," who leaves home to become a famous actress, only to be discovered by her boyfriend, Moses, as a stripper ("Oy, oy, oy, oy, where is your clothes? / You better go and get your dresses, / Everyone's got the op'ra glasses"). "The average U.S. citizen was perfectly epitomized in Berlin's music," Jerome Kern told Alexander Woollcott, who wrote the first book on Berlin, in 1925. "Both the typical Yankee and the Berlin tune had humor, originality, pace and popularity and both were wide awake."

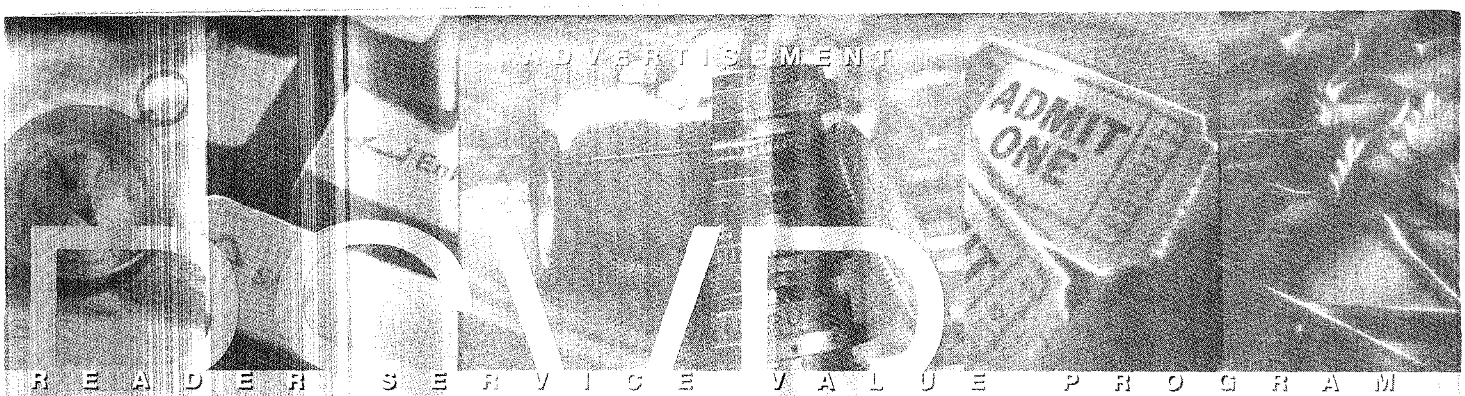
Berlin saw the syncopated beat—the "ragged metre" he mythologized in song—as a correlative for the nation's tension and momentum. "All the old rhythm is gone and in its place is heard the hum of an engine, the whirr of wheels, the explosion of an exhaust," he told the *Times* in 1924. "The leisurely songs that men hummed to the clatter of horses' hoofs do not fit into this new rhythm. . . . The new age demands new music for new action." Speed also defined Berlin, who was as wiry and as streamlined as a whippet. "I used to think he was like quicksilver. Moving fast. Now you see him, now you don't," says Berlin's eldest daughter, Mary Ellin Barrett, who is the author of a memoir about him. "But when you saw him the experience was extremely intense. He was there with you. If you were talking to him, he would focus, even if it was only for a few minutes." Berlin was perhaps most focussed on the relation of song to the social fabric: he understood its subliminal impact ("It influences everybody, whether they know it or not") and its role in creating America's landscape of promise. He wrote, "What care I who cares for the world's affairs / As long as I can sing its popular songs?"

Indeed, many of Berlin's songs became—and remain—emblematic of the great ceremonial constructs of American public life, among them war (the First World War: "Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning"; the Second World War: "God Bless America," "This Is the Army, Mr. Jones"), Christmas ("White Christmas"), Easter ("Easter Parade"), Broadway ("There's No Business Like Show Business"). Berlin, who won the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1945, contributed to the political fortunes of a fellow Tin Pan Alley tunesmith, the flamboyant New York Mayor Jimmy Walker ("It's a Walk-In for Walker"), and he produced Presidential campaign songs for Al Smith and Dwight Eisenhower, whose "I Like Ike" campaign song was a rewritten Berlin number. Once, during the Vietnam War, the lyricist E. Y. Harburg, who shared Fifth Avenue offices with Berlin but not his political viewpoint (Harburg was an avowed left-winger), tweaked Berlin by suggesting that he rewrite "God Bless America" and call it "God Help America." Berlin tweaked him back with a heartfelt stanza:

Martha's Vineyard, dear old ASCAP
And a flat near Central Park
God bless America
When things are dark
God bless America
My Noah's Ark.

THE blessings of America were not immediately apparent to the Baline family, who lived during Irving's childhood in four dank rooms on Cherry Street, in New York's Lower East Side. The neighborhood, with its estimated two hundred and ninety thousand people per square mile, dwarfed Dickens's London for density; it was, as Harold Evans writes in "The American Century," "perhaps the worst slum in the history of the Western world." Berlin, the youngest of eight children, didn't talk much about the impoverishment of his early life. "At a certain deep level he was impenetrable," Mary Ellin Barrett says. "He would let out things to you, but you had to be very fast to catch them. He did not repeat himself." She continues, "When I was a little fresh kid, I'd say, 'What was it like being poor, Daddy?' And he'd say, 'Poor? What is poor? I was never cold. I always had enough to eat.' He actually said, 'You are what you know; and it was all I knew.' "

At the age of thirteen, Berlin, "sick with a sense of worthlessness" at not being able to contribute to the family commonweal, left home and, as he put it, "went on the bum." "He tried to get a job on the docks," Linda Emmet, his second daughter, told me. "He was so small and so slight that he didn't have the muscles for it. He said, 'You know, I always knew that I had to follow a line, and it would've been easy to cross the line and do something that was not totally honest.' He never did. He had this real moral rectitude." She added, "He could be selfish; he could be reclusive; but he was always a just man." In 1901, with a poor education and no skills, Berlin was merely a runaway with nothing to fall back on but his raspy tenor voice. Singing was the line of least resistance, and it was legal. A bed in a flophouse cost fifteen cents;



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ACROSS
1 GAG + A
4 TEAM (*teem* hom.)
7 A + POLL + O
8 TH(ROW)OU + T
9 HER + B
11 NEAREST (anag.)
13 MATCHES (2 defs.)
17 SPA + N
19 PLEASANT (anag.)
20 SATING (anag.)
21 ETON (hid.)
22 PEER (*pier* hom.)

DOWN
1 GOT + HAM
2 ASHE (anag.)
3 GAR + RE(n)TS (*rag* rev.)
4 TOWER (2 defs.)
5 ALUMS (anag.)
6 MOT + E (*Tom* rev.)
10 SEE + PAGE
12 TENTER (hid.)
14 A + FLAT
15 CH(A)IN
16 APSE (anag.)
18 ANTE (hid.)

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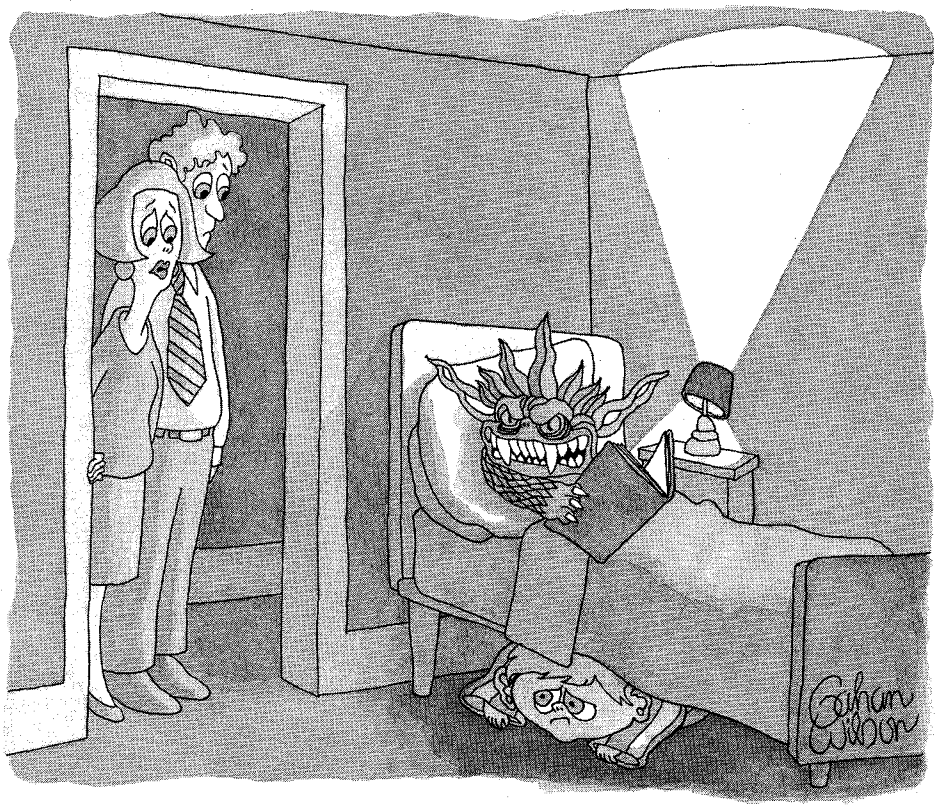

"Shouldn't Willis be in the bed and his imaginary monster under it?"

• •

if he couldn't hustle enough money busking in saloons, he would sleep on a park bench. Song, which Berlin called "a heart raiser and worry banisher," manufactured the blue skies he would later invoke. He sang on street corners; he sang as a song-plugger and as a "plant" at Tony Pastor's; he sang briefly in the chorus of a Broadway show and as a singing waiter in a Chinatown watering hole called the Pelham Café—a gig that went on until six in the morning.

"Part of Berlin's genius was that he was open to so much," says the musical-theatre historian Robert Kimball, who, with Emmet, is co-editing "The Complete Lyrics of Irving Berlin." "He was responsive to everything around him. He began as a parodist because he listened so well." As a singing waiter, Berlin hustled extra change by improvising risqué lyrics to the popular tunes of the day. "He honestly absorbs the vibrations emanating from the people, the manners, and the life of his time," Jerome Kern told Woollcott. "And in turn gives these impressions back to the world simplified, clarified, glorified." Berlin's ability to take the pulse of his public was developed at the Pelham Café. Philip Furia, in his fascinating new biography, "Irving Berlin: A Life in Song," quotes Jubal Sweet, another Pelham employee, recalling how Berlin worked the room: "Now a singing waiter couldn't be stooping over every time a coin hit the floor. Spoil his song like—see? No, he'd keep moving around easy, singing all the time, every time a nickel would drop he'd put his toe on it and kick it or nurse it to a certain spot. When he was done, he had all the jack in a pile."

From the beginning, Berlin kept his eye on both the music and the money. Although he made only thirty-seven cents in royalties from "Marie from Sunny Italy," he seized his opportunity. His career seemed to incarnate the advice given in a guidebook to immigrants on how to survive in America: "Do not take a moment's rest. Run." Between 1907 and 1914, he published a hundred and ninety songs. "Sometimes I turn out four or five songs a night, so you can imagine how many bad ones I write," he told Woollcott. Among his nine rules for writing popular songs, which included "heart interest" and "open vowels" for euphony, by far the most important one was the last: "Work and *work* and then WORK." "I gather ideas, and then I usually work them out between eight at night and five in the morning," he said. If he had to work during the day, he pulled down the shades and composed by artificial light. "I sweat blood between three and six A.M. many mornings, and when the drops that fall off my forehead hit the paper, they're notes," he told the magazine *Theatre*. Over the decades, the pace changed but not the pattern. Furia quotes Moss Hart, who collaborated with Berlin on several revues and on the musical "Miss Liberty" (1949): "Writing a show with Irving Berlin is tantamount to entering a monastery. You live it, breathe it, eat it and were it not for the fact that he allows you no sleep at all, I should say sleep it."

FROM the outset, Berlin was acknowledged to be a phenomenon. The New York *World* hailed him as "The Man Who Is Making the Country Hum"; his Tin Pan Alley fraternity sung his prowess with ditties like "Izzy Get Busy, Write Another Ragtime Song"; in 1919, he set up his own publishing company, to exploit the copyrights on his music. But Berlin was an improbable prodigy. He couldn't read or write music, and played only the black keys on the piano, in the key of F-sharp. "The key of C is for people who study music," he said in a 1948 interview. "The fact that I compose only in F-sharp gave me certain harmonies that other writers missed, because they knew more about music." He used a transposing piano, equipped with a lever under the keyboard which allowed him to hear his tunes in any of the other major or minor keys. Berlin, who had an uncanny ear, couldn't call out from his fingers what he heard in his head; his remedy was to hire a series of musical secretaries to explore his songs' chording possibilities and write them down. In "The Gershwins," a book of lyrics and reminiscences which Kimball wrote with Alfred Simon, Berlin describes what happened in 1919 when George Gershwin applied for the job. After notating Berlin's "That Revolutionary Rag," he played Berlin some of his own stuff. "What the hell do you want to work for somebody else for?" Berlin told him.

Berlin's awareness of his limitations led to ingenious solutions. "In my ignorance of the laws of music, I have often broken all the laws," he said in 1915. "The result was an original twist." He continued, "Also, in that my vocabulary being somewhat limited through lack of education, it follows that my lyrics are simple." In 1924, when he met Ellin Mackay, a pedigreed, sophisticated writer, then twenty-one—she later became his second wife (Berlin's first wife died of typhoid fever after their honeymoon to Cuba, in 1912)—she said to him, "Oh, Mr. Berlin, I do so like your song 'What Shall I Do?' " The song was "What'll I Do?"; Berlin pointed out the contraction, and added, "Where grammar is concerned, I can always use a little help."

He had a kind of genius for poeticizing the colloquial. For instance, in the song "Snooky-Ookums" (1913) he teased the notion of lovers' baby talk: "She's his jelly elly roll / He's her sugey ugar bowl." In Berlin's hands, ordinary locutions like "they say it's wonderful," "let's have another cup of coffee," "say it isn't so" became powerful romantic occasions. As he explained in a 1954 interview, " 'Easy to sing, easy to say, easy to remember and applicable to everyday events' is a good rule for a phrase." Berlin, who was a member in good standing of the witty Algonquin Round Table, worked on his vocabulary, and made a serious study of Alexander Pope and his supple use of the heroic couplet. He found cunning ways to get interior rhymes into a thirty-two-bar song. In "Puttin' on the Ritz," the play of high-low diction is set against a rhythm that Alec Wilder, in his classic study "American Popular Song," calls "probably the most complex and provocative I have come upon":

Come let's mix where Rockefellers
Walk with sticks or "um-ber-el-las"
In their mitts—puttin' on the ritz.

But the real power of Berlin's songs is their exquisite pleasure in simple things, whether dancing cheek to cheek ("Heaven / I'm in heaven") or dressing up in top hat, white tie, and tails ("I'm dudein' up my shirt front, / Puttin' in the shirt studs, / Polishin' my nails").

Berlin's phonics could make his sense of wonder—the exclamatory "Oh!"—echo like a cheer through the wordplay of his apparently simple rhymes:

There's no business
Like show business
Like no business
I know.

"SONG and sorrow are playmates," Berlin once said. In his life, he knew more than enough about sorrow. He was a private, moody man, who in his later years became reclusive and rebarbative. His first memory was of watching from the roadside as his home in Russia was burned to the ground. He lost his homeland at five, his father at twelve, his family at thirteen, his first wife at twenty-four, his infant son at forty, and a good part of his fortune in the stock-market crash at forty-one. The pressure of songwriting kept him busy and hid his depression from him, but he could never successfully banish it. Over his long career, Berlin was immobilized at least twice—from 1930 to 1932, and from 1957 to 1962—by periods of anxiety. "I developed the damnedest feeling of inferiority," he said of the episode in the early thirties, an era that, besides the crash, saw the emergence of sophisticated musical challengers like the Gershwins and Rodgers and Hart. "I got so I called in anybody to listen to my songs—stockroom boys, secretaries. One blink of the eye and I was stuck." Although much has been made of Berlin's ear, his eye was also crucial to his sensibility. He needed to see the spell of a song working on the faces of his listeners—to see his music, and himself, being taken in. Once, while he was writing for the Marx Brothers musical "The Cocoanuts" (1929), he woke up the show's director, George S. Kaufman, at 2 A.M. to sing him his newest number, "Always." Kaufman later recalled, "I was presumptuous enough then to question Irving's first line, 'I'll be loving you always.' Always was a long time for romance. I suggested therefore that the opening line might be a little more in accord with reality—something like 'I'll be loving you Thursday.' " Berlin dropped the song from the show. "When he sings right in your face, he's reading you, studying you for your reaction," Joshua Logan, the original director of "Annie

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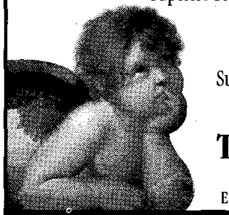

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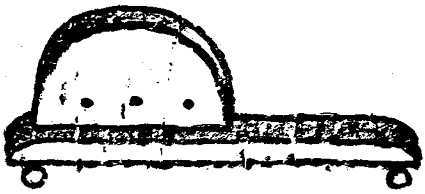
Get Your Gun," wrote in his autobiography. "If one blinked too often or one's eyes glazed for a second, Irving was apt to put the song away."

At other times, a song could so stun auditors that Berlin misread their silence as indifference, which is what happened with "There's No Business Like Show Business." "Irving, what's the matter, you left out the finale," Logan said to him at the end of the first day of rehearsals, after Berlin had played through the score again, minus that number. Berlin said, "I didn't like the way you reacted this morning. It didn't register." Logan wrote, "It wasn't petulance. He meant it. I was astounded. I asked him what he'd done with the lead sheet, and he shrugged and said he'd put it away in his files somewhere, and I said, 'Irving! Get it out of those files.' He argued with me, but I kept on insisting, until finally he gave in and went out to his secretary and asked her to dig it out of the files, and do you believe this—they couldn't find it?" Logan continued, "Eventually, thank heaven, they came up with his original lead sheet. There wasn't even a copy."

"ANNIE GET YOUR GUN" was what Berlin called a "situation show." Of Berlin's twenty-one stage productions, fourteen were revues, where the star was the song rather than the story. But Rodgers and Hammerstein had recently weighed in with "Oklahoma" (1943); Harburg and Arlen had done "Bloomer Girl" (1944). "Annie Get Your Gun" was Berlin's entry into this postwar fascination with the folkloric, and it gave him a way of asserting, as the show does, that "anything you can do I can do better." It was "just a kind of fresh wind in him," Mary Ellin Barrett says. "The freedom of the war over. Wanting to prove himself yet another time." The musical was not Berlin's idea, or, originally, even his assignment. He stepped in after Jerome Kern's sudden death, in 1945, and while he dithered for twelve days about whether to do the show he produced five songs, including "There's No Business Like Show Business" and "Doin' What Comes Naturally." In the end, Berlin came up with the entire score in two months; the delightful "Anything You Can Do" was written in the fifteen minutes between when Berlin discussed the concept with Josh Logan at a rehearsal and when Logan got back to his apartment, twelve blocks away. " 'Hello, Josh—this is Irving. What do you think of this?' And then he sang the whole damned first chorus," Logan recalled. In what Alec Wilder calls a "near perfect" score, Berlin, with a "curious absence of ego," established the folksy wit of Annie Oakley: "You don't have to go to a private school / Not to turn up your bustle to a stubborn mule."

As Annie, the brassy Ethel Merman could pick off a song's high notes and key words just as surely as her character could hit clay pigeons. "With all due respect to the Gershwins and Cole, Irving gave me range, allowing me a kind of vulnerability I'd been missing in girls like 'Nails' Duquesne, Blossom Hart, and Hattie Maloney," she wrote in her autobiography. But Merman as Annie was neither believably vulnerable nor innocent—not that it mattered. She was a sensational smart-mouth who never related as well to the people onstage with her as to the people in the audience. At a recent preview of the new version of "Annie Get Your Gun," when the production was struggling to make Berlin's numbers land for the fetching Bernadette Peters, who *is* believably vulnerable, the way they'd landed in the noisy Merman editions, Stephen Sondheim approached the show's award-winning librettist, Peter Stone. "Steve said, 'Stop pushing for it,' " Stone told me. " 'Irving Berlin didn't write for smash finishes. He wrote gentle. He's very simple and straightforward. It was Merman who got the encores and the splash finishes.' "

In the last fifty years, theatregoers' expectations of musicals have changed: they demand story, not just standards. The history of "Annie Get Your Gun," whose songs are evergreen but whose book is not, bears out this change in public taste. The musical, which originally ran for more than eleven hundred performances, has never quite achieved its proper place in the Broadway pantheon. Part of the show's problem is the unwitting but breathtaking racism in the characterization of Native Americans. "Just like Battle Axe, Hatchet Face, Eagle Nose, / Like Those Indians, I'm an Indian too / A Sioux," Annie sings in the original, and, while the song is funny, its implications are not. At a recent panel discussion, Stone debunked Broadway purists who wanted to see the show performed as it was originally written, asking how they'd like to hear somebody onstage sing "I'm a Hebrew too / A Jew—ooo—ooo." Of course, "I'm an Indian Too" has been cut from the new version, and where the Native Americans were once the butt of the show's jokes they're now the agents of them. Native Americans are cleverly used as part of Buffalo Bill's travelling Wild West Show, and are also woven into a resuscitated romantic subplot—changes that completely remove the script's bad odor.



But the larger stumbling block for any "Annie Get Your Gun" production is its dramatic construction. The challenge for Stone and for the director, Graciela Daniele—one that to my mind they've solved elegantly—has been to make the songs emerge naturally from the tender simplicity of Annie's passion for the sharpshooting headliner, Frank Butler (Tom Wopat). Daniele has worked to deepen the lovers' tempestuous relationship, and Stone has found a concept for the show which makes its spirit of innocence acceptable to a nineties audience. Now the story of Annie and Frank Butler is a play put on by Buffalo Bill and his troupe. "The framework removes it once from us, so that *we're* not making it simple—Buffalo Bill is making it simple," Stone says. "It's something they would not forgive us for but would forgive him for, because that's the business he's in." This adjustment releases all kinds of emotional and visual energy into the show: the cowboy band is onstage; the tent and the klieg lights are erected before our eyes; the scenes are called out by the actors, who are all part of Buffalo Bill's multiracial troupe of travelling players. Here "There's No Business Like Show Business" is not an incidental show-biz anthem sung by a trio in the middle of a musical but the defining opening number, which rouses the troupe to start staging Annie and Frank's saga.

"Berlin was making the book take hard left and right turns to accommodate the songs," Stone says. "If you're gonna do them again, you've got to smooth that part out." The great ballad "They Say It's Wonderful"—a conditional love song of the kind pioneered by Rodgers and Hammerstein in numbers like "People Will Say We're In Love," to raise the issue of love in the first act, before it was possible for the characters to actually be in love—has been shifted almost to the end of Act I. "They weren't ready to sing it yet," Stone says. Likewise, Berlin's score originally had Frank's beautiful ballad "The Girl That I Marry" followed immediately after his exit by Annie's famous "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun." "It was as if you just suddenly turned the page and a page was missing," Stone says. "So what I did was have her sing a chorus of what he has just sung, changing it to 'the girl that he marries.' She sings this thing and *then* sees her gun. She comes back to reality. She's been in a reverie. That is, she can dream about it, but she isn't gonna get him. Because a girl with a gun doesn't get anybody." Even the disputed "I'm an Indian Too" was unconvincingly positioned at the end of Act I, just after Annie had been jilted by Frank Butler. "I would have taken 'Indian' out even if it hadn't been racist," Stone says. "She can't be funny there. She's just lost her man."

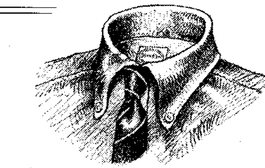
The finale of the new "Annie Get Your Gun" is "Old Fashioned Wedding"—a song that, as it happens, originally sounded a musical finale of a different sort. Written in 1966, on the occasion of Ethel Merman's revival of the show at Lincoln Center (a sensational performance, which I saw), it was Berlin's last great flourish. It was also the final showstopping fling of the traditional musical, to which joy and idealism would soon become alien. With her clarion swagger and a voice that could pass as young even if the fifty-eight-year-old star could not, Merman sang:

I wanna wedding surrounded by
  diamonds in platinum.
A big reception at the Waldorf
  with champagne and caviar.
I wanna wedding like the Vander-
  bilts have,
Everything big, not small.
If I can't have that kind of a wedding,
I don't wanna get married at all.

The adamancy of "Old Fashioned Wedding" foreshadowed Berlin's own intransigence about the changes in musical fashion which came into being with the Vietnam War. The center of American life—and the American musical that mythologized it—was collapsing. "Count your blessings," Berlin counselled in song; but the society now nightly counted body bags. Inevitably, this disillusionment was registered in popular song, and there was some irony in Berlin's position. His music, as the critic Gilbert Seldes wrote, in "The Seven Lively Arts," had "torn to rags the sentimentality of the song which preceded it." He continued, "What makes the first rag period important was its intense gaiety, its naivete, its tireless curiosity about itself, its unconscious destruction of the old ballad form and the patter song." Sixty years later, it was Berlin who was being dispossessed. "You don't have to stop yourself," he said in a 1962 radio interview, about writing songs. "The people who have to listen to your songs tell you to stop." He told Robert Kimball, "It was time for me to close up shop."

Berlin's last public appearance was in 1973, when he sang "God Bless America" at a White House dinner for returning P.O.W.s. Then, in keeping with his favorite family mottos—"Take it in your stride" and "Don't count on it"—Berlin retired his genius. He wrote songs now and then for private occasions but not for publication. From his town house in Beekman Place, he kept track—increasingly by phone—of his business interests and his friends: Harold Arlen; Stanley Adams, the head of ASCAP; the writer Ed Jablonski. Once, according to Jablonski's forthcoming biography of Berlin, a depressed Arlen, who had just turned seventy-two, and who usually wrote Berlin an annual birthday song, complained to his friend of having "shot his wad." Berlin, his eighty-eight years notwithstanding, wrote back:

A nightingale looked up to God
And said, "Dear God, I've shot my wad,
No longer can I do my thing,
Dear God, no longer can I sing."
And he replied, "Don't be a schmuck,
No nightingale has had such luck,
Your songs have built a golden nest
For Stanley Adams and the rest.
They're praying for the moment when
You get off your ass and sing again." ◆



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MUSICAL EVENTS

SCHOENBERG, ANYONE?

The Met makes grand opera out of "Moses und Aron."

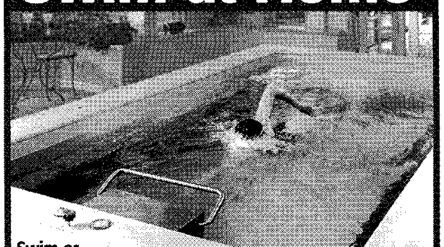
BY ALEX ROSS

Arnold Schoenberg looked like a great man. That bald head, shining like a dangerous new asteroid; that mouth, perpetually forming a deadly phrase; those eyes, high beams of genius, finding you, accusing you. Rilke wrote, "You must change your life"; the eyes of Schoenberg said, "I must change your life." It makes sense that Schoenberg, who, in 1909, established dissonance as the musical language of modernism, should have capped his career with the fragmentary, visionary music drama "Moses und Aron," which had its Metropolitan Opera première last month. No other artist of the last hundred years has played the prophet to such confused perfection. Schoenberg radiated righteousness and calculation, naïveté and neurosis, certitude and doubt. He banned the idolatry of conventional tonality and led classical composition into the desert, where it wanders to this day.

Schoenberg somehow gained a reputation as a mathematical composer—as the inventor of a new twelve-tone order. In truth, his ideas were unkempt and a bit mad. He viewed his breakthroughs as "miracles." He analyzed music in dire moral terms: one justification for what he called "the dissolution of tonality" was that harmony had become decadent, that "vagrant chords" were incestuously breeding among themselves. (For example, diminished-seventh chords exhibited "paleness" and "frailty.") He saw himself as a "kind of dictator" who had suspended the old musical society with emergency laws. During the Nazi period, he began to think that his authority could encompass more than the musical realm: in one memo he pictured himself as the leader of a Jewish government-in-exile, living with a film crew in an airplane and in a mobile home. Finally, he saw himself as a religious leader, as a creative force in Judaism. He entitled one poem "Psalm 151."

It is no surprise that Schoenberg remains a controversial and not very widely loved figure. His defenders have tried to counter the impression that he was an authoritarian fanatic: they tell us that he played tennis, wore polka-dot ties, doted on his children. (One of his sons, Ronald Schoenberg, is a judge in affluent West Los Angeles; when O. J. Simpson appeared in court after assaulting Nicole Brown Simpson in 1989, Judge Schoenberg meted out the not very Biblical punishment of four hundred and seventy dollars in fines.) Advocates also point out that Schoenberg was a devoted teacher, perhaps the greatest teacher of music who ever lived. He made not one but two major composers—Alban Berg and Anton Webern—in his image. Schoenberg lacked the rampant egoism of Richard Wagner, a figure whom he otherwise resembles.

Schoenberg the man has never lacked respect. It is the music that is in search of love. Many eminent musicians believe in it, and this season they have been exceptionally active on its behalf. At the same time that James Levine brought "Moses" to the Met, Riccardo Chailly, the conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, smuggled Schoenberg's "Five Pieces for Orchestra" into a concert of Brahms at Avery Fisher Hall. Chailly is an advocate of the music of Alexander Zemlinsky, Schoenberg's half-forgotten teacher, and the Concertgebouw's performance of the "Five Pieces" looked back to Zemlinsky's gold-leaf, Klimt-like style. It seemed here as if tonality had been dissolved not to "emancipate the dissonance," as Schoenberg put it, but to



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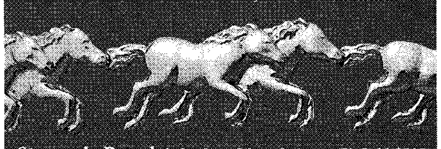

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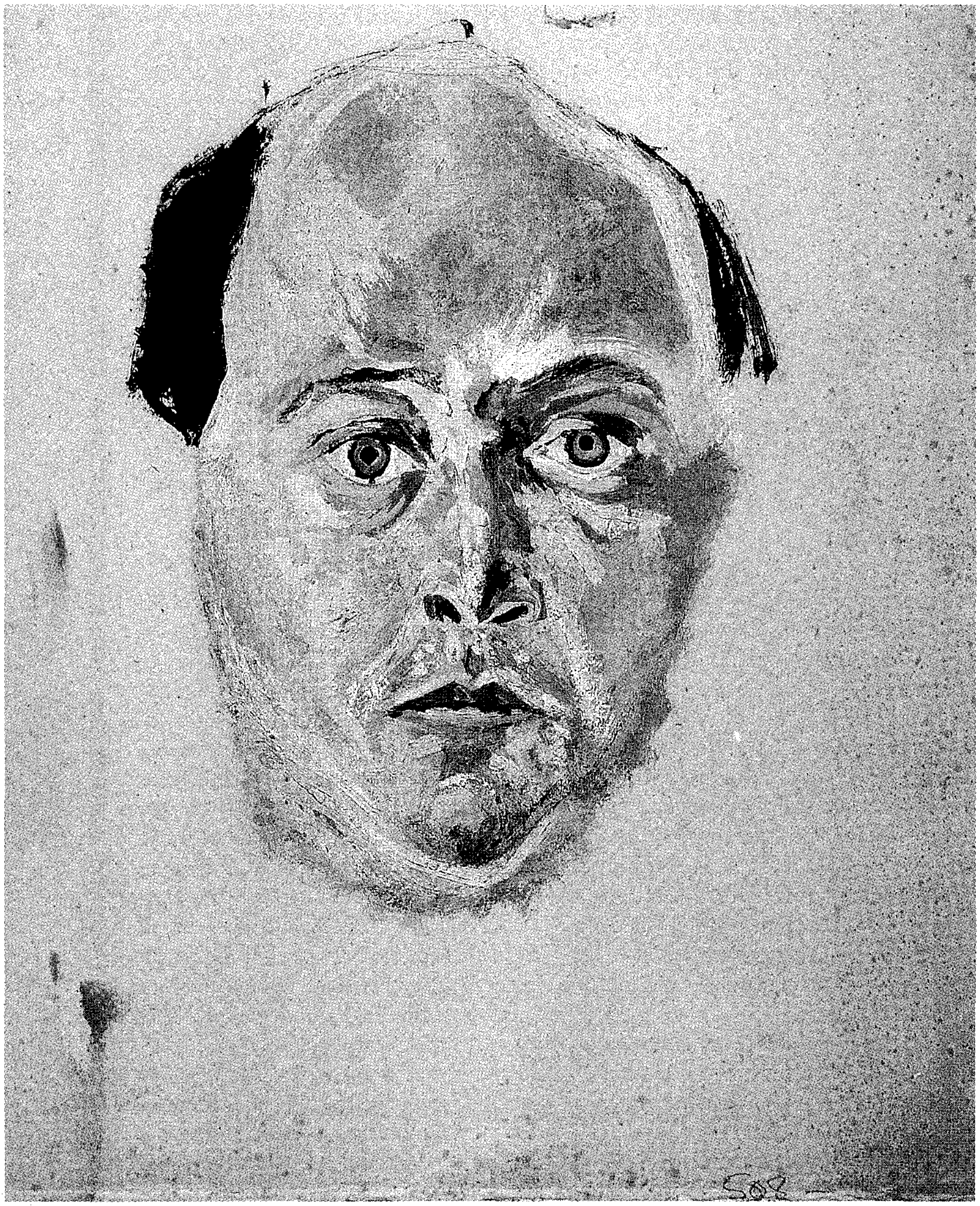
emancipate the note. The crux of the work was not some crashing noise but a little splatter of notes on the harp and celesta at the end of the third piece. You could almost feel the audience becoming hypnotized, much to its surprise.

Levine, meanwhile, has been campaigning heavily for the Second Viennese School in recent years—a new production of Berg's "Wozzeck" two seasons ago, concert performances of Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire," a lustrous recording of the Berg Violin Concerto, with Anne-Sophie Mutter—and "Moses und Aron" is perhaps the most ambitious undertaking of his career. In his hands, the music flowed with supernatural ease. Gone was the feverish, hectoring tone that often mars Schoenberg performances. The orchestra spoke the music so fluently that five- or six-note ideas could be heard and remembered as real themes. (I became absorbed in the adventures of the violin phrase that sighs at the end of the first scene and reappears whenever there is talk of the Promised Land.) The chorus, too, sang its raucous parts as second nature. This "Moses" made musical sense: it did not sound like an infamously complicated work, and the audience, on the two nights that I was in the house, seemed engrossed. Still, I found it hard going. As in Wagner, it is difficult to listen only to the music when so much else is impinging from outside.


Schoenberg in a 1918 self-portrait: Is Moses his alter ego?

THE great problem with "Moses" is not the music but the message. The opera is an impossible snarl of religion, politics, and musical aesthetics, whose ambitions exceed even its formidable means. It takes off from passages in the Book of Exodus—Moses and the burning bush; Aaron conveying Moses' monotheistic message to the people; Moses receiving the revelation on the mountain; Aaron making the idol of the Golden Calf in his absence; Moses smashing his tablets in rage upon his return—and yet the Bible is merely the point of departure. Moses, the difficult thinker, and Aaron, the fluent explainer, can be seen to allegorize almost any situation in which idea confronts reality. So "Moses" can easily become, for example, a political parable of the history of Zionism in the early twentieth century. Moses represents Theodor Herzl, while Aaron represents the bourgeois European Jews who had compromised Herzl's vision. (Schoenberg thought that Herzl was on the right track with a plan to colonize Uganda.)

"Moses" also concerns itself with music. In this less explicit allegory, Moses represents Schoenberg himself. Schoenberg considered his new realms of non-tonal and twelve-tone composition to be sacred spaces that other composers profaned. "Many modern composers," he wrote in 1926, "believe they are writing tonally if they occasionally introduce a major or minor triad, or a cadence-like turn of phrase, into a series of harmonies that lack, and must lack, any terms of reference.... They betray their God." This judgment might have applied to Schoenberg's own student Berg, who was then engaged in writing twelve-tone music with what he called "strong tonal feeling." At the time, Schoenberg assured Berg that he had had other sinners in mind, but it's clear from later comments that he looked askance at his student's manipulation of the twelve-tone system toward romantic ends.

Aaron, too, "betrays God," in Moses' eyes. During the Dance Around the Golden Calf, in the second act, you may hear suggestions of Stravinsky's tribal stomp, Hindemith's youthful sarcasm, Kurt Weill's jazziness. The climactic debate between Moses and Aaron echoes a squabble between Schoenberg and Weill in 1928. Weill had written a manifesto announcing that "music is no longer a matter of the few" and that composers must speak "a language understood by all." Schoenberg asked in response whether "one is supposed to talk only about matters which the most stupid can understand." In the "Moses" libretto, Aaron says that he drew water from the rock by speaking to it "in its language, which the people also understand," while Moses berates him for speaking "more simply than you understand." Aaron, like the composers who mix twelve-tone rows and traditional triads, dumbs down God. When Aaron is in charge, the music keeps slipping into quasi-tonal patterns: open fourths, open fifths, hints of E major and C minor, and the like.

There's a tinge of hypocrisy in Schoenberg's dogmatism. Like a fundamentalist brandishing erotica, he first wallows in musical sensuality and then condemns it. In later years, he would readmit tonal elements into his music; indeed, "Moses" itself depends on quasi-tonal lyricism to create contrast and repose. One way out of this dilemma is to see Moses and Aaron as complementary forces: Moses' severity and Aaron's approachability are co-dependent. The tragedy at the end of the second act is that they have stopped communicating with each other. As Aaron descends into decadence, Moses becomes too extreme. Moses is so in love with his idea of a pure, inexpressible God that he begins to denounce all manifestations of Him as "godless images"—including the tablets of the Ten Commandments and the pillars of fire and cloud. Moses, too, has lost his way. If you're feeling generous, you might view him as a skeptical self-portrait.

Such, at least, was the impression I had from Graham Vick's vivid production at the Met, in which "the people" were brought up to date as twentieth-century Jews. The Voice of God became a group of oratorio singers in evening clothes: you felt the opera's curious shame at having to be an opera. Moses seemed not quite in his right mind: John Tomlinson, the splendid English bass, hinted as much by shuffling about the stage and wavering between speech and song. Philip Langridge, a plaintive Aaron, was slick, manipulative, but not egregiously in the wrong. You felt that the people would degenerate no matter what Aaron or Moses said to them. The crowd's robust athleticism in the first act lapsed by stages into narcissism, sadomasochism, and boredom. The sex acts in the orgy around the Golden Calf had the affectlessness of underwear ads. At the end, a huge wall separated Moses from the people, and he stumbled over the oratorio singers' empty chairs—a bright metaphor for the absence of community and of God. There were fewer wasted ideas in this production than in any I've recently seen at the Met. Vick built, step by step, a coherent tragic interpretation. The sets, by Paul Brown, spoke simply, in bright desert colors.

Schoenberg, alas, would have hated it. In the libretto for Act III, for which music was never written, Moses does not fail: he regains his confidence and surrounds himself with soldiery. The solution to the question posed by Act II—how can freedom coexist with righteousness?—turns out to be death. In the Bible, both Moses and Aaron disobey God and die before reaching the Promised Land. In Schoenberg, Aaron bears all the guilt, and Moses passes judgment on him. It is a cruel ending, and also a derivative one, with weird echoes of Strauss's "Salome" and "Elektra": the soldiers prepare to kill the sinner, like Herod's soldiers in "Salome," but instead Aaron spontaneously falls dead, like Elektra. Schoenberg never quite left that glittery, morbid world of fin-de-siècle Vienna, where there was a lot of talk of the inexpressible, where "the word beyond speech" was on everyone's tongue, and where every story ended in bloody murder. ♦

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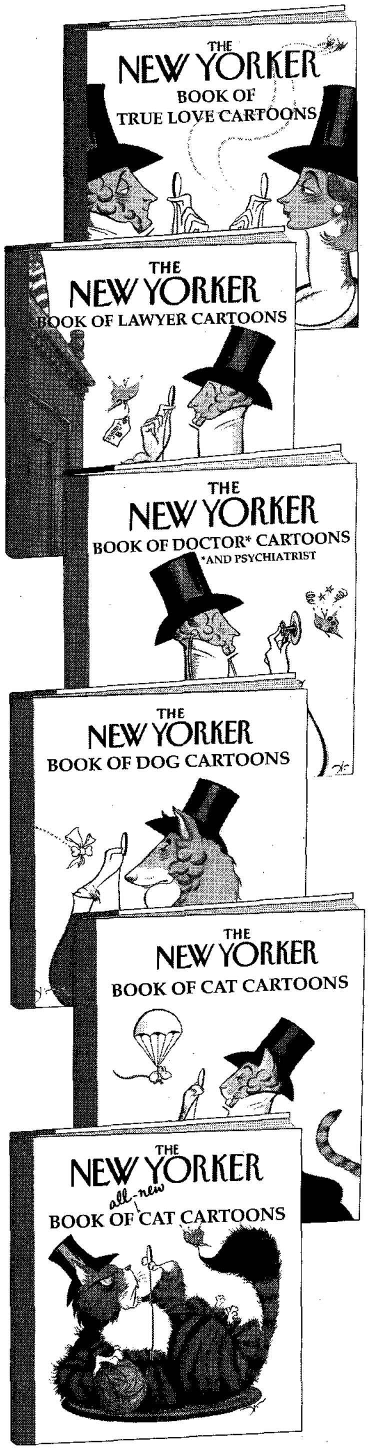
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BOOKS

THE ACCIDENTAL FÜHRER

How Adolf Hitler reinvented himself and Germany.

BY JANE KRAMER

WHEN I read last month that Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, had exhausted his unpopular if appropriate opposition to plans for a Holocaust memorial in the middle of Berlin, and that the plans, much revised, now included a wall of a million books, over three hundred feet long and sixty-five feet high, I thought for one macabre moment that those books must be the ones thus far devoted to the life and legacy of Adolf Hitler. And I wondered if the wall was big enough to hold them all. Ian Kershaw, in his own new book, “Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris” (Norton; $35), tells us that the bonfire Joseph Goebbels lit in Berlin on the night of May 10, 1933, to commemorate the “new spirit” of the German Reich consumed twenty thousand books. They were written by the kind of people who would themselves be burned before the Reich ended, and it is another gruesome irony of the Hitler legacy that historians, trying to explain it, have produced nearly as many pages as Nazism's *Übermensch* scholars, rekindling Goebbels's bonfire that night in nearly every university in Germany, managed to destroy.

Hitler achieved power by stage-managing the spectacle of power.

Kershaw cites a statistic that there are now a hundred and twenty thousand “pieces of work” on Hitler. “Pieces” seems, finally, to be the accurate word, since they include not only biographies, memoirs, diaries, documents, journalism, official profiles and evaluations, and, of course, histories of the period but also fictions, revisionisms, and fantasies of the Führer that have run a gamut from George Steiner's lofty novel “The Portage to San Christobal of A.H.,” which is really a disquisition on evil disguised as fantasy, all the way down to some right-wing idiocy on my desk now, a fantasy disguised as a disquisition called “The Jew of Linz,” which holds that Hitler murdered six million Jews because of an unfortunate brush with Ludwig Wittgenstein in a Linz *Realschule* when they were both fifteen.

Kershaw, who teaches history at Sheffield, has already made a huge contribution—four books, two collections—to this desultory genre. His new book is the first long volume of what will be a two-volume life, and when the project is finished it will arguably become the standard, as close to definitive as anything we are ever likely to see. He has had a wealth of new material to draw on: notably, several new volumes of Hitler's prewar writings and speeches, and, from Moscow, Goebbels's famous “lost diaries,” which had in fact been gathering dust in the Soviet archives. But he has no illusions about some “real” Hitler lurking in all that material, someone who will settle the arguments about charisma and cause, cynicism and passion, Bolsheviks and Jews which have set British historians at one another's throats, divided German historians into hostile camps, and, finally, with Daniel Goldhagen's “Hitler's Willing Executioners,” brought the battle to America. On one level, Kershaw's book is fairly straightforward history. On another, it's an object lesson in how to turn the instruments of mass communication into the technologies of totalitarianism. Hitler was the first politician to exploit them, and he did it so effectively that Germany's first democracy voted itself out of existence.

THE public Hitler—the Hitler who in 1918 emerged from the anonymity of the Vienna men's hostels, the Munich beer halls, and the Kaiser's trenches—was a preposterous figure, with no discernible talent except a small talent for making speeches. It was just enough of a talent to keep him on an Army instructor's salary for two years after the war ended, “reëducating” Bavarian soldiers who were waiting to demobilize, and had nothing besides Hitler to relieve the tedium and disappointment of their barracks evenings. The distance Hitler travelled from that first captive audience to an audience of millions, hooked on the spectacular of the Führer (they were in fact the unpaid extras of the spectacular), is precisely the distance Kershaw traces. But

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the delusions that hooked them, the delusions that eventually became Germany, involved another kind of distance—the distance between real history and imagined destiny. Kershaw says that Hitler admired Mussolini. He admired the Mussolini style. He was impressed by "the Fascist legend of a heroic 'seizure of power,' " a legend that Mussolini had managed to concoct out of whole cloth. Hitler liked the theatricality of Italian Fascism—the triumphal marches, the allusion to a great Roman past, and, of course, the fear it inspired. But Mussolini was very much a creature of his own Italian tradition. There was, after all, a history of Rome behind his martial impersonations, which may be why, in the end, most Italians were able to distinguish him from Italy and, more important, distinguish themselves from him. There was nothing like a tradition behind Hitler. Hitler invented a great German past the way he invented a great German destiny; he did it as he went along. He took his cues not from history but from the mythology that in Germany passed for history. He was shrewd enough to identify himself with a handful of real people who had somehow entered that mythology—with Bismarck, with Wilhelm I, and even with Barbarossa, the twelfth-century king with the red beard, who was widely believed to be sleeping inside a Thuringian mountain, waiting to awaken and lead Germany to its final triumph. But the Führer whom Hitler produced for Germany was otherwise pure invention, a caricature of a white knight from one of his favorite operas—a point that Kershaw underlines, early on, when he compares the young Hitler of "Mein Kampf" fiction to the young Hitler of record, and concludes that one of the few things in Hitler's bildungsroman which weren't an outright lie or a fantasy was his addiction to Wagner.

The vision he took from Wagner, however crude and cruel the translation, was the vision of power as *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a performance that could replace reality. This vision was at the origin of his modernity. It staged his myth of awakening. It was the theme his Nazi editors folded into the muddled manuscript that became "Mein Kampf," producing the moment of revelation when Hitler strolls through Vienna as a young man and encounters a sinister, caftaned, Jewish "apparition." It fuelled the hysterical science of propaganda that Goebbels perfected for him, replacing the soap-box and the beer-garden speech with the records and radios and films and loudspeakers that transformed his performance into a spectacle for the masses. It gave a shape to his insanity—or to his evil, if you happen to believe that in the case of a Hitler the distinction is at all useful or instructive. It allowed him to convince the German rabble that it was a race of Lohengrins and Tristans—Germans were certainly eager to believe that—and, more to the point, that he was the race's most accomplished and evolved specimen. It created an iconography of violence and what you could call the globalization of hatred, because the one thing that's clear from reading Kershaw is that the "Germanness" of Hitler's ravings about blood and soil and destiny was simply a language for something global in its implications—something, at any rate, well beyond the understanding of the old warlords who had sat at Versailles in 1918 arguing about a treaty that was going to keep the world safe from Germany. Kershaw says that Hitler privatized the public. What Hitler really did was to annihilate it. He exalted Germany into a tribal state and replaced the public with the false rapture of community.

I'M not sure that this is how Ian Kershaw would describe National Socialism, but it's there in his book—maybe because there isn't much about Germany between the two World Wars that's not in the book. Kershaw is modest. He says that he was quite daunted by the work of his predecessors, and that he was also "somewhat critically disposed towards the [biographical] genre." He was not much interested in the debate among British historians over whether Hitler was a shrewd cynic or a true believer. (His books document the fairly obvious truth that, like any successful hustler, Hitler was both at the same time.) Nor was he much interested in joining the German debate over whether Hitler had produced the Germany he wanted or Germany the Hitler *it* wanted. What interested Kershaw was "the character of his power—the power of the Führer."

Kershaw's young Hitler was less a monster than a remittance man in the making. There was nothing specifically Hitlerian about his childhood. It was bleak, but not different in the main from a lot of petit-bourgeois turn-of-the-century childhoods. It came with the requisite sickly mother and gloomy, distant, philandering father. The feelings of dislocation that Hitler claimed later to have suffered were actually fairly typical among the children of ethnic-German civil servants moving around Austria during the last days of the Hapsburg empire, and his longing for "Germany" was in some ways even more typical. His famous prudishness, which by all accounts bordered on pathology, was something psychiatrists used to associate with the supposed absence of one of his testicles, but more likely it was an aggravated case of Victorian sexual claustrophobia. (Queen Victoria's House of Hanover was, after all, a house *from* Hanover.) Nor was his obsession with late-empire Hapsburg decadence that unusual, except, of course, in the degree and rapidity with which he came to identify it as a Jewish disease—a taint of the blood or, as today's neo-Nazis put it, a Jewish gene.

In the end, nothing about Hitler's childhood really prepares us for the Führer. Hitler did learn a certain amount about politics: he learned that it was smarter to avoid his father than to contradict him, and easier to exploit his mother than to disappoint her. He was her only surviving son, and after his father's death she became his patsy, half-sweetheart and half-servant. She let him quit school at the age of sixteen, and when he first left Linz for Vienna, at seventeen, she indulged him to more of what Kershaw calls "a life of parasitic idleness." (The poverty of his Vienna years, like his moment of revelation with a caftaned Jew, is mainly another "Mein Kampf" fiction.) Before his mother died, in 1907, she made sure not only that he would get his orphan's pension but that her sister would in any case help to pay his way. In a sense, the only interesting thing about this indolent and spoiled boy was the extent of the deception he practiced. He never studied in Vienna, though that's what his family thought he was doing there. He was never admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts, though for a while, at least, he made a point of applying. He painted, but he counted on the kindness of a couple of Jewish dealers to sell his terrible, tourist watercolors. During the five years he lived in Vienna, he never even looked for a job. When he finally did leave, he wasn't offering his soul to the Fatherland, as he later claimed; he was on the run from the Austrian draft. Kershaw thinks that Vienna didn't so much form Hitler as provide him with a handy reserve of ideology—Georg Ritter von Schönerer, the paterfamilias of Austrian anti-Semitism, was old but active in Vienna then, and when Hitler arrived Karl Lueger was still the mayor—and a language of enemies on whom to blame his failure.

For Kershaw, it was the First World War that formed Hitler or, as he says, "made Hitler possible." Hitler enlisted as soon as war was declared, and Kershaw believes that "the legacy of the lost war provided the conditions in which the paths of Hitler and the German people began to cross." He thinks that "without . . . the humiliation of defeat, and the upheaval of revolution" afterward, no one in Germany would ever have heard of Adolf Hitler, or possibly ever have wanted to. But Kershaw never really confronts the anomaly of Hitler's war years. Hitler served with distinction. He was decorated twice, once on the recommendation of a Jewish officer. He refused promotion in order to stay at the front. The Austrian misfit known heretofore for indolence, hypochondria, violent rages, and a total incapacity for any sort of affective life was able to perform for Germany in twenty-five battles—to survive with calm under fire, to endure the intimacy of the trenches, and to recover without complaint from debilitating wounds. Kershaw would say that this Hitler is beside the point, because for Kershaw the point is the extent to which Hitler found a métier at war, and the extent to which the loss of that métier drove him, perhaps as much as any hatred, during the first postwar years. Hitler's curious brief for making speeches to the demobilizing troops was a brief he took—and his officers encouraged him to take—as a mandate for indoctrination, a chance to speak for Germany against its enemies within, and, finally, to fix the defeat on them. The public Hitler was born in those speeches, and that Hitler never changed.

Kershaw describes the years of Hitler's ascendancy as Germany "working towards the Führer." The words come from a speech, in 1934, not by Hitler but by a functionary in the Prussian Agriculture Ministry named Werner Willikens. Willikens said:

> Everyone with opportunity to observe it knows that the Führer can only with great difficulty order from above everything that he intends to carry out sooner or later. On the

BRIEFLY NOTED

SOUTH OF THE BORDER, WEST OF THE SUN, by Haruki Murakami; translated from the Japanese by Philip Gabriel (Knopf; $22). "I don't care where we end up," middle-aged Hajime tells Shimamoto, the mysterious lost love of his boyhood. "I just know I want to go there with you. And begin again." Things are unlikely to work out with a woman who is impossibly beautiful and given to vanishing, but Hajime, an otherwise responsible husband and father, is determined to pursue his dream. In this short, surreal novel, the haunting detail is found beneath a glaze of ordinariness—like the face of another old girlfriend, "silent and dead," glimpsed through the window of a passing taxi.

THE MUSIC LESSON, by Katharine Weber (Crown; $21). This novella-length mystery is as intricate as an acrostic. A trio of clues—the motives of the narrator, who is a woman recovering from the accidental death of her child; the paintings of Vermeer; and the ideals of Irish nationalism—yield, by the book's close, an almost perfect, if chilling, answer. When the author falters, it's because her story sometimes threatens to become larger than the scheme she has blocked out for it, but her skill is such that her puzzle engages the reader's attention throughout.

THE COUSINS' WARS: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND THE TRIUMPH OF ANGLO-AMERICA, by Kevin Phillips (Basic; $32.50). This splendid book is at once a family album and a mirror. Phillips outlines the influence on the American Revolution of the English Civil War, in which hundreds of seventeenth-century New Englanders went home to fight under Cromwell. Then, with the mixture of diligence and insight that has characterized his earlier work, the author goes on to examine our Revolution and Civil War and to show how the internal schisms of the three wars often paralleled one another, and how centuries-old alignments persist in the voting patterns of our own time. Every step of the way, Phillips extracts news from history.

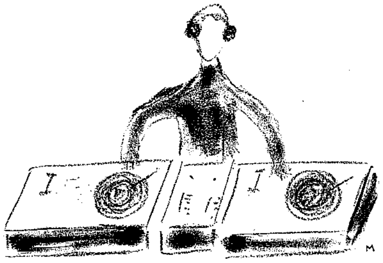
THE CRIME OF SHEILA MCGOUGH, by Janet Malcolm (Knopf; $22). "The truth does not make a good story; that's why we have art," the author writes in this examination of the American legal process. Her subject is a disbarred lawyer named Sheila McGough, who was convicted of fourteen counts of felony in 1990. McGough believes that she was framed—that a Virginia court was irked by her unrelenting defense of a con artist named Bob Bailes and therefore tried to prove, unjustly, that she was in collaboration with him. Paradoxically, Malcolm suggests, it was McGough's irritating and nearly pathological honesty that resulted in her conviction. And as the author examines the uneasy relationship between the law's search for "the whole truth" and its need for a coherent narrative, the reader is convinced—and ultimately unsettled—by her Orwellian formulation.

> contrary, until now, everyone has best worked in his place in the new Germany if, so to speak, he works towards the Führer. Very often, and in many places, it has been the case that individuals . . . have waited for commands and orders. Unfortunately, that will probably also be so in future. Rather, however, it is the duty of every single person to attempt, in the spirit of the Führer, to work towards him. Anyone making mistakes will come to notice it soon enough. But the one who works correctly towards the Führer along his lines and towards his aim will in future as previously have the finest reward of one day suddenly attaining the legal confirmation of his work.

In other words, the Führer is you, a palimpsest of your own grievances, and as lawless as you care to make him. He will legitimatize your violence if it works "towards him," and punish you for it if it doesn't work towards him "correctly." He is your license to inform, lie, plunder, torture, terrorize, and murder, but he isn't a formula for decision. Nazism's "collective will" saved Hitler from the muddy waters of decision—he rarely made a decision—and left him an avenging symbol of Germany's new imperatives. This, for Kershaw, is the real revolution in politics which began in 1923, with the mobilization for Hitler's Munich putsch. It was a piece of psycho-political transference so dazzling and so crude that I'm surprised the psychiatrists who made a career of Hitler's testicle ignored it. It removed Hitler from any complicity in failure and planted the Führer at the locus of every success. It turned a grab bag of virulent German prejudices into a paranoia about Jews which should have reasonably been a paranoia about him. It caught the country in a spiral of denunciations and reconciliations that resolved nothing but the problem of Hitler's own wildly vacillating loyalties.

Sometimes the Führer spectacular hid behind the "legitimacy" of Realpolitik. The best example in Kershaw's book is his long description of the round of negotiations in the winter of 1932-33 when Hitler and a couple of powerful new supporters wore down the failing Reich President, Paul von Hindenburg, and Hitler took over the Chancellery. More often, it was staged according to a simple, cathartic formula of incitement, betrayal, and attrition. A case in point is the Night of the Long Knives, in June of 1934, when Hitler, having provoked his four and a half million Storm Troopers into a final orgy of working toward the Führer, seized on the excuse of a terrorized public to order the murder of their generals—thereby exchanging the useful but undisciplined services of the S.A. for the more tractable services of a new Reichswehr in a new Reich. There was also, of course, the elaborate staging of anti-Semitism. For Kershaw, the most revealing example of that is the Nuremberg party rally, in September of 1935, where Hitler "solved" the problem of violence against Jews with the legal violence of the Nuremberg Laws. Those laws stripped all German Jews of citizenship, enshrined intermarriage as a crime against the Third Reich, and began the formal process of placing Jews beyond the pale of "Germanness"—a process so effective that by the time Hitler got to his Final Solution, six years later, most Germans who were not Jews could claim not to have noticed anything different. Finally, there was the spectacle of Nazi diplomacy—diplomacy by fiat—in which Hitler presented himself to the world in performances of such grotesque (soon to be Chaplinesque) high comedy that even Germans were startled when the French rolled over and the British began talking about his growth and statesmanship. The result was that in March of 1936 thirty thousand German troops walked into the Rhineland unopposed and occupied it. For Kershaw, 1936 was the end of "hubris" and the beginning of "nemesis," but for the Germans it was vindication.

A problem for Kershaw is that his Hitler was in so many ways an accidental Führer—an accident of the war, of the Depression, of democracy with no democratic experience to sustain it, of the "Godless Bolshevism" that so many Germans feared. (Remember, the first German concentration camp, at Dachau, was built for interrogating Communists, Socialists, and Social Democrats.) It could be argued, from reading Kershaw, that Hitler was merely the man who threw the switch on a bomb that might just as easily have been defused. Nothing about his Führer except those five years as a corporal contradicts the Hitler who slept until noon, hustled money, hated paperwork, bored his Cabinet (that is, until he abandoned the pretense of meeting with a Cabinet), and came to prefer to books or plays, or even to Wagner, an evening of *spätzle* Westerns in the company of what his photographer called an "inconsequential and feather-brained" girl named Eva Braun. His social life, and probably his sex life, remained a monologue. He was still incapable of decision, although for a long time the only person really aware of this was Goebbels, who had to keep conjuring up the deus ex machina of the Führer and was always complaining to his diary about Hitler's "wavering."

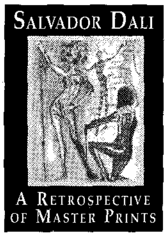


Hitler was in some ways an armchair revolutionary, who pushed the buttons that set his allies and enemies in motion, acting out the various scenarios at his disposal, like people finishing the same story in a parlor game. But the Führer was his own message. He would emerge from a couple of weeks in the Austrian Alps, refreshed by the reverence of the thousands of people who arrived daily, with orders to march "in a silent column" past him whenever he took a walk. (It was always a downhill walk.) He would get in a car or a plane—he was said to be the first politician in Europe to campaign by plane, and he was certainly the first to understand the plane as an "entrance"—and in less than a week would make twenty or thirty "major speeches." (What Kershaw means by "major" is the full *Sieg heil* spectacle: a million people, a ranting Führer, a forest of swastikas raised by torchlight, and a thousand armed men in brown uniforms.) Kershaw calls it a "performance, the like of which had never before been seen in Germany," and, in fact, it was covered in the nationalist press more as theatre than as electioneering. "An unprecedented sensation," in the words of one provincial paper. "Führer weather" is the way another paper took to describing sunshine. When Hitler flew, it was "the Führer over Germany." He liked the idea so much that he had the words painted on his plane. By 1932, as a Hamburg housewife wrote in her diary, "no one said 'Hitler;' always just 'the Führer.' " She meant the spectacular. Germany was the Führer or it wasn't Germany. The highways that Hitler was going to build for troops and tanks heading toward Lebensraum were the Führer "expressed" by the German people on the road. The forests, the mountains, the blond pigtails of innocent German girls—they were all the Führer. The only person who seems to have had a problem with the Führer was

Hitler. By far the most interesting photographs in Kershaw's book are pictures of Hitler in a series of Führer costumes: you could call them "Hitler working towards the Führer." The party postcard of 1924—a dreamy, poetic Hitler looking out of a prison window after his failed putsch—was for obvious reasons rejected, and, by way of creating a better Führer, Hitler posed in an S.A. shirt and helmet (rejected), in Bavarian *trachten* (rejected), in pinstripes, with his Alsatian and a grand piano (rejected), and once even in white tie, tails, and a top hat. The image he chose is ordinary: the Führer in a wrinkled raincoat, with his thumb hooked over a mismatched belt.

THE fact remains that no one and nothing stopped Hitler. The received wisdom has been that the First World War reparations Germany had to pay were what ultimately strained Weimar to the breaking point—that Weimar would have survived with a better deal. I think it's more likely that Weimar would have survived with some understanding on the part of the Allies that the war had cancelled all the familiar etiquette about how to deal with your cousins on the losing side. Germany was not occupied beyond the Rhineland. No signatory to the Treaty of Versailles intervened when Hitler outlawed the opposition, or dissolved the Reichstag, or disenfranchised the Jews, or put the democrats in concentration camps. No one sent troops even when Hitler marched into the Rhineland—the one transgression that under the treaty was in fact actionable. The givens of postwar German democracy were these: a ruling class that abhorred democracy and a proletariat that had no competence in distinguishing a democrat from a demagogue. Weimar was left to guarantee its own survival, and this was the one thing that it had neither the consensus nor the resources to do. Kershaw makes a very incidental point of the fact that the S.A. wasn't the only militia in Germany during Weimar. The Communists and even the Social Democrats had militias, and so, of course, did most groups on the nationalist right. For fourteen years, the Reichswehr was only one of Germany's postwar armies—which is why Hitler finally was able to court its officers successfully. Germany got democracy, but no one, as we have learned to say, made Germany safe for democracy. No one anticipated Hitler, because no one besides Hitler really grasped how much the character of power had changed since Sarajevo. You didn't have to be a general like Kurt von Schleicher to seize it, or an industrialist like Gustav Krupp to afford it. Hitler's modernity was that he carried populism on the wings of its new technologies to its own absolutely unexplored frontiers. He understood that anyone who controlled the illusion of empowerment in Germany controlled Germany.

There is something eerily familiar about Kershaw's Germany. It's not where we live, but it's there in how we live, and maybe the reason we're still determined to believe in an explanation for Hitler is that we do recognize the world that Hitler conjured into reality before its time or, indeed, its appropriate science. Today, Hitler would be a Web site. You would be able to click on Hitler the way you can click on, say, Cindy Crawford. You could join a Hitler chat group and play the voice of the Führer in polyphonic sound. You could enter the virtual reality of Nuremberg, take part in Kristallnacht, download the Protocols of the Elders of Zion along with your astrological chart, order your Aryan pedigree by credit card, read patriot hate comics "for the whole family," put a hit on the President of the United States, and zap the Jew in a video game against the Rothschild conspiracy. All these options are, in fact, available to any latter-day enthusiast of the Nazi cause who happens to own a laptop—and most of the enthusiasts do—and they are only a click of the mouse away from the rhetoric of national salvation that Hitler loosed on Germany some twenty years before he actually started bombing England. In most countries today, you can find an audience for anything in less time than it took Hitler to find a piece of paper in jail. Primo Levi once wrote that "reason, art, and poetry are no help in deciphering a place from which they have been banished." Kershaw's Germany is a place where context, too, was banished. It floats in memory like those cyberspace images, but the terrible difference is that Germany was real. The crazies were in the street, the Jews were in camps, and Hitler wasn't a patriot game you played at home. In Germany, the technologies of communication caught a whole nation in a vicious circle of its own susceptibilities and conventions. It's useful to be reminded that Hitler's hubris and Germany's suicide amounted to the same thing. ◆



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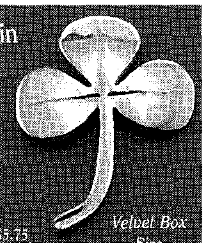

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THE THEATRE

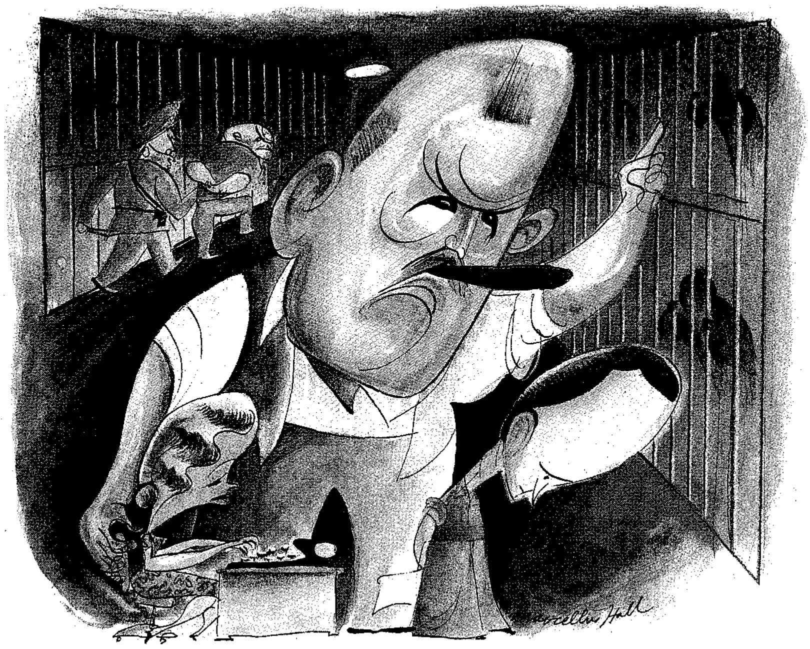
FUGITIVE MIND

Returning to the origins of Tennessee Williams, and "Death of a Salesman."

BY JOHN LAHR

"NOT ABOUT NIGHTINGALES," an unproduced 1938 play about a prison hunger strike which Trevor Nunn successfully resuscitated last year at the Royal National Theatre, in London, and which he has reorchestrated for a transatlantic visit at the Circle in the Square, is the first work that Thomas Lanier Williams signed "Tennessee." In taking the new name, Williams, who was twenty-seven and had finally graduated, with a B.A., from the University of Iowa's writing program, aligned himself with the pathfinding ancestors of his bullying and absent father, C. C. Williams, who was a shoe salesman. There were pioneers—and an early Tennessee governor—in the family's background, but his father had given up unknown routes for trade routes; Williams, styling himself as a kind of theatrical pioneer, decided to reclaim his heritage. "Out of the sheer surfeit of being beaten down, I gathered out of my father's fierce blood the power to rise somehow," he wrote to his friend Donald Windham. "And how could the rise be gentle?" At the end of "Not About Nightingales," Williams's leap of faith is prefigured by the literal leap of the play's desperate hero, a stool pigeon known to his fellow-inmates as Canary Jim (Finbar Lynch). "Now is the time for unexpected things, for miracles, for wild adventures like the storybooks!" Jim says, just seconds before he dives from the warden's window into the water that surrounds the island fortress, and to what he hopes is his liberation. He continues, "Almost a chance! I've heard of people winning on a long shot."

And Williams did. Like Canary Jim, he was planning a great escape: he was about to spring himself from the incarceration of his unhappy St. Louis family life. In December, 1938, he mailed the final draft of "Not About Nightingales," along with several other submissions, to the Group Theatre's playwriting contest (he was subsequently awarded a hundred dollars for a trio of one-act plays), and then he hightailed it for New Orleans, where he discovered both his sexuality and his dramatic voice.



Damnation and blighted love: Corin Redgrave as the brutish prison warden in the American première of Williams's early play "Not About Nightingales."

In the production, Williams's sense of spiritual imprisonment finds a haunting correlative in Richard Hoover's coruscating set (well lit by Chris Parry), which submerges the audience in a gray, caged world. One end of the stage is bounded by the sliding doors and steel bars of two-tiered prison cells; at the other end is the warden's office, from whose window an excursion steamer (called, inevitably, the Lorelei) offers the tempting sight and sound of freedom. The environment imposes on both the inmates and the audience a sense of trapped energy. In this brutalist universe, there is no color, no softness, no sense of rest or promise. The iron grates on which the prisoners march are transformed efficiently into trapdoors to conjure up the subterranean "Klondike"—a "little suburb of hell" where the inmates are roasted at the whim of the brutish warden (the red-faced and snarling Corin Redgrave); the gratings also make the shape of a crucifix on the stage floor, hinting at the damnation that hangs in the air as grimly as the memory of love.

"Not About Nightingales" is a jejune but fascinating piece. The absence of Williams's distinctive cadences and of his usual psychological complexity marks it as the work of a tenderfoot. Based on a well-publicized incident in a Pennsylvania prison, the play is written from the outside in, whereas Williams's mature work is built from the inside out. His storytelling skill is apparent as he spins a yarn about the strike and a blighted love affair between Jim and the secretary Eva Crane (Sherri Parker Lee), who works with him in the warden's office; but he can't yet penetrate the characters, who remain largely stick figures. In one ungainly but revealing passage, Eva quotes an entire Keats sonnet ("When I have fears that I may cease to be"), which spells out both Williams's romantic philosophy and his autobiographical special pleading. "He was like you, he had a lot of things he wanted to say but no chance to say them," Eva tells Jim about Keats. "He got out of his prison by looking at the stars. He wrote about beauty as a form of escape."

The choreographic panache of Nunn's production invests Williams's script with a poetic stylishness that his prose lacks. The clanging bars, the echoing curses, the cadences of the prisoners' chants as guards march them off to supper conjure a suffocating deadliness that makes Jim's yearning for liberty as palpable as Tennessee's. Williams dreamed of being "the first original Homo Emancipatus—meaning (COMPLETELY FREE MAN!)"; he even subtitled "Stairs to the Roof," another unproduced early work, "A Prayer for the Wild of Heart That Are Kept in Cages." Until "The Glass Menagerie" made him famous, and even afterward, Williams saw himself as on the run—first from the philistines and then from himself. "I won't ever make a good captive," he wrote in his diary in the early forties. "I guess what I will do is drive beyond safety—till I smash—Cleanly and completely the only hope."

Although "Not About Nightingales" seems on the surface to be more protest than prayer, the unrelenting intensity of Nunn's approach takes it quickly beyond the political to the allegorical. "Ev'ry man living is walking around in a cage," Jim says, preaching the gospel of the imagination, which Williams embraced early and never lost. Even at the end of his career, when his art and his life were a shambles, he was invoking the themes and images first raised in the play. "Occasionally in my work I have offered a slight hint of the difficulties involved in the accident of survival," Williams wrote to his former agent Audrey Wood on August 14, 1973. "Sometimes a moment of grace, a word, a gesture, a letter raps out a code message on the walls of prisons." Williams believed in the imagination's power to transcend barbarity; his tragedy was that he was betrayed by his imagination into a barbarousness of his own making (drugs, drink, loss of community). The Royal National Theatre, which has done more than any other organization on either side of the Atlantic to revive Williams's reputation, has given this small play a wonderful production, adding a compelling piece to the puzzle of his emergence as the century's great theatrical genius.

THE fiftieth-anniversary production of Arthur Miller's masterpiece "Death of a Salesman" (at the Eugene O'Neill) has to contend with an ugly revolving set, designed by Mark Wendland, which robs it of a sense of place and hobbles its pace. While Willy Loman is breaking down before our eyes, the images that drive him crazy don't so much press in on his disintegrating mind as swing past it like dumplings on a lazy Susan. This throws Loman's character and the play slightly off kilter, but "Death of a Salesman" still packs a wallop. Robert Falls's production, imported from the Goodman Theatre, in Chicago, is muscular without always being nuanced. The massive Brian Dennehy is almost too strong and too solid in himself for the panic-stricken salesman, yet he still makes Loman's misguided love for his son Biff and his crazy competitiveness hurt like a punch to the heart. The casting here is generally uneven. It's impossible to see Ted Koch's Happy as the louche womanizer the script calls for, and Kevin Anderson's Biff has not a whiff of the derelict about him. Howard Witt is droll and shrewd as Charley, the envied next-door neighbor, but Elizabeth Franz turns in the evening's most fully realized performance, as Willy's beleaguered wife, Linda. When she rounds on her sons, accusing them of not being there for Willy, her fragility and resignation are transformed, with startling reality, into a fierce resolve. "His name was never in the paper," she tells the boys. "He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid." Franz, who is as thin as Dennehy is large, grounds the play and gives it a strong, almost stoic emotional center. With its punishing battle between parent and child, the script seems to acquire different meanings as audiences and their dreams grow old with it. Miller's reading of the nation's collective unconscious is so accurate that the flaws in this somewhat overpraised production hardly matter. "Death of a Salesman" is a defining part of the century's story; its revival is not to be missed. ♦

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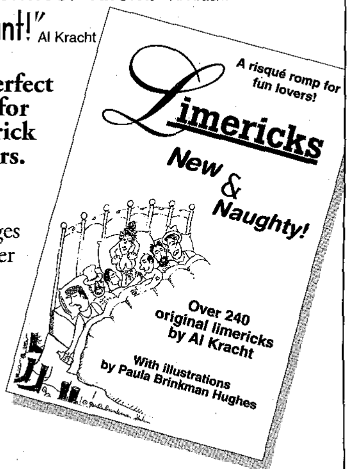
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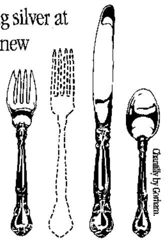
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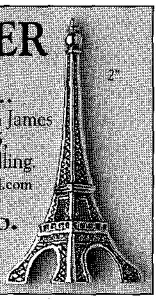

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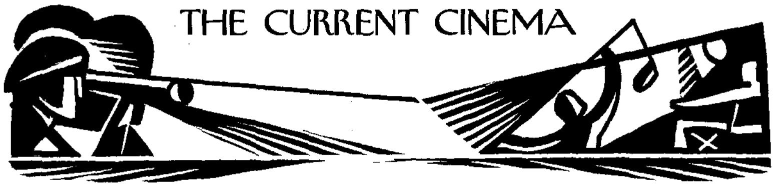


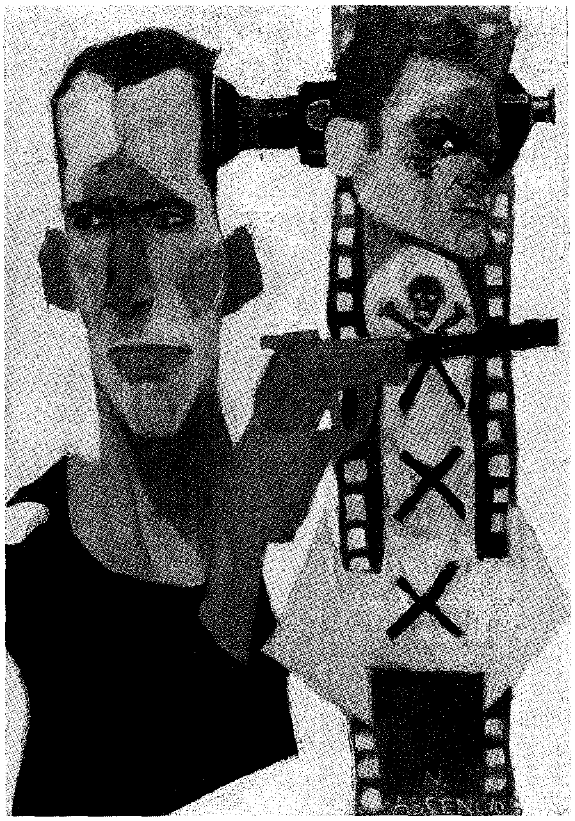
SNUFF AND NONSENSE

A sombre cinematic errand, and a vehicle for Vinnie Jones.

BY ANTHONY LANE

THE new Joel Schumacher movie is called "8mm." Unconfirmed reports suggested that this referred to the maximum depth of cerebral cavity required for a sentient mammal to enjoy the previous Joel Schumacher movie, "Batman & Robin." In fact, the title concerns a small reel of film which is handed to private detective Tom Welles (Nicolas Cage). It was found in the locked safe of a deceased bigwig; his wealthy widow, Mrs. Christian (Myra Carter), has discovered that it portrays the apparent murder of a young woman. What Tom has to do is find out who the woman was and what really happened to her; in other words, whether we are talking snuff.

Snuff movies are the kind of media legend that just won't go away, like the pornographic *jeunesse* of Joan Crawford, or the existence of a historical epic that contains the line "Men of the Middle Ages! Welcome to the Hundred Years War!" During the nineteen-eighties, the rumor slowly grew that people were being killed on film—a repellent notion, not least to responsible movie critics. (We like to think that's our job.) Whether the myth had any foundation is less interesting, perhaps, than the conditions in which it was encouraged to flourish: those were the days when the camcorder was coming into its own—when viewers began to grasp the liberating likelihood that they could be filmmakers, and thus to test the practical (forget ethical) limits of invaded privacy. Also, the eighties saw a mass outbreak of get-a-load-of-this special effects, plus an accompanying rash of impatience: since everything could be faked, what could we be sure was true? And where could we buy it?



Nicolas Cage, detective, with Joaquin Phoenix, his Virgil on a trip to the underworld of "8mm."

Such are the matters that weigh upon the conscience of Tom Welles. He scours the files of Missing Persons, identifies the girl as a Mary Anne Mathews, follows her trail to Los Angeles, and learns that she did indeed tumble into bad company. The surprising thing about the tale is that it springs almost no surprises. I sat there praying for a twist: Would Mary Anne stroll in, alive and well, in the final reel? What about the widow? With her fluting voice and the creepiness of her smiling frailty, Mrs. Christian could easily have started a whole new trend: the slasher granny. As it is, everything goes according to plan. The world is horrible and unrelieved, the bad men bleed, and Tom is so infected by porno sickness that he all but turns into an animal. In short, a lovely night out at the cinema. I don't know why the projectionist didn't show us the snuff stuff and get it over with. It lasts only a couple of minutes, and it couldn't have been more depressing than two hours of Joel Schumacher.

For a man who began as a window dresser on Fifth Avenue and later designed the costumes for Woody Allen's "Sleeper," Schumacher is much possessed by death. "The Lost Boys," "Flatliners," "Dying Young": each of these films was openly aroused by the prospect of an early checkout from life. Despite its churning content, "8mm" seems a less gratuitous undertaking; it is dull but not dishonorable, and Schumacher has at last begun to ask how a nasty scrape with death can foul the air of your existence. The Tom Welles who kicks off the picture in a suit and tie winds up as a weeping heap. The problem is that everything else in the film preëmpts that transformation and denudes it of power; from the earliest scenes, the skies feel beaten up and the interiors are lit like dungeons. You look at Tom's home, where he lives with his wife (Catherine Keener) and baby, and you think, For pity's sake, could somebody please turn a lamp on? The script is by Andrew Kevin Walker, who wrote "Seven," so we were right to expect a descent into the underworld. If the overworld looks exactly the same, however, what's the point?

Fortunately, just as the movie is getting to be too much and you're ready to go and ask for extra blood and bonemeal with your nachos, Joaquin Phoenix rolls up. He plays Max California, a clever clerk in a Hollywood porno emporium. "Hey, it's not a gas station!" he calls out to one of his busier customers. "You pay before you pump." Max assumes the role of Tom's personal Virgil on his trip to the pit, but, more important, he lightens the load of the film. When he and Tom stand chatting outside the store, against walls of sun yellow and grass green, you realize two things:

one, how few decent moments of simple conversation, as opposed to moping or raging, there are in the Schumacher œuvre (the exception being "The Client") and, two, how desperately "8mm" needed a shot of black comedy. Since deep-core pornography, below a certain level of depravity, always seems to involve hale fellows with Mitteleuropa accents and leather on every portion of their bodies except the feet, this should not have been hard to achieve. But "8mm" means business, and there are too many shots of Cage acting wounded and lonesome. He was plainly under orders to switch into major hangdog mode, yet he's a naturally funny guy, whose best performances have popped with firecracker reactions, and it's only the presence of Phoenix that inspires him to play hooky and have fun. Even Max has to quit the stage eventually, though, and the last shot of the film shows poor Tom back in his kennel, barely managing a watery smile. "8mm" takes itself so seriously, and trades so dumbly on the assumption that a satiety of grungy bleakness must be worthy of our respect, that only when it's over do you realize what a narrow strip of feeling it chose to occupy. Sorry, Mr. Schumacher: it doesn't pump, and it doesn't pay.

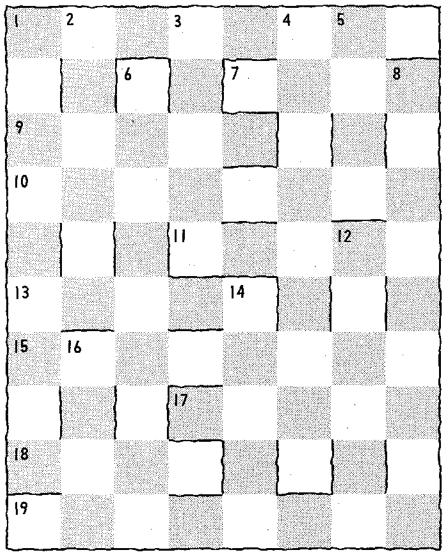
The new British gangster film, "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels," has been a booming hit in its native land. I have a suspicion that it could take off here, too, and that, a year from now, sophisticated American travellers will be signing up for the full Smoking Barrels Mean Bastard Tour with Luxury Pub-Wrecking Option. Those with money to burn could even be offered a guided tour of Vinnie Jones. Vinnie plays a debt collector named Big Chris, and he is the best reason to see the picture. I find it difficult to describe the Jones face, with its almost unbroken line of eyebrow, although I feel confident that you could strap it to the front of a truck and use it to clear snow. "Two Smoking Barrels" is Vinnie's first film; until recently, he was a soccer player or, more accurately, a Visigoth in the cunning guise of a soccer player. He attained the status of Public Hero No. 1 back in 1988, when, awaiting a corner kick, he reached behind him and, without looking back, grabbed the private parts of Paul Gascoigne (his only rival as England's leading lout) and twisted hard. This touching moment was captured in a famous photograph; the people looked upon it and said, Surely this man could be a movie star. And, lo, it came to pass.

"Two Smoking Barrels" tells of Eddie (Nick Moran), Tom (Jason Flemyng), Bacon (Jason Statham), and Soap (Dexter Fletcher), a bunch of friends with a good idea. The lads send Eddie, an accomplished cardplayer, to an illegal game and wait for him to return in triumph; but the game is rigged, and they find themselves owing half a million pounds to Hatchet Harry (P. H. Moriarty), the employer of Big Chris. At this point, they overhear—as one so often does—a gang of uglies next door discussing a forthcoming drug heist. So our heroes get into place and duly rob the robbers. The story marches on toward a sanguine shootout, after which only a handful of the characters are left intact, and it closes on a cliffhanger—the most blatant what-happens-next setup since the teetering bus at the end of "The Italian Job."

Not that all this should be mistaken for a proper movie. Rather, think of it as a carefully constructed entertainment for the benefit of people who really, really like beer commercials. The director, Guy Ritchie, has filmed a number of advertisements, and it shows in his style: when you can't decide what to do, swing the camera around the room like a cat, and—here's a nice one—try freezing the action for no reason and then have objects continue to move in slow motion. Add a gravy-brown filter for that scummy East End look and, voilà. As for the dialogue: given that Cockney rhyming slang was lurching out of date by the time Michael Caine made "Alfie," in 1966, what hope for resonance now? And why do all the actors—apart from Vinnie Jones, whom I would not wish to upset—serve up these linguistic leftovers in such a numb, crawling tone? It's supposed to be a caper flick, not a deathbed scene. Listen to the street trader selling dodgy perfume in the opening shot; if he pattered that slowly in the London I know, he'd be out of business. Word has it that at a Los Angeles screening of "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels" no less a personage than Tom Cruise was heard to comment, "This film *rocks*." I rest my case. ◆

8 x 10 CRYPTIC

NO. 79 BY TODD REW



ACROSS

1 Distributes convertible test cars (8)
7 Egg on vandals "updating" Manet's originals (4)
9 Homer expert corrected "oar" in article (5)
10 Licks counters rudely (8)
11 Confidence of degenerate after start of trial (5)
13 Allows borrowing of unopened mixes (5)
15 Private Idaho houses so overdue (8)
17 Company describes cardinal rule (5)
18 Base still in use in recession (4)
19 Drops bad scene penned by dentist (8)

DOWN

1 Border of steel ain't flexible (5,4)
2 Rough classes audited (6)
3 Fish move quickly around mid-January (5)
4 Caveat due: better quit (9)
5 In speech, regrets trick (4)
6 Odds of recovering wild sprig soon (9)
8 Fraternal society has raised point: these animals are extinct (9)
12 Planted, granted, in ears (6)
14 Officer employed by Miss Argentina (5)
16 Store menial lets go of head of lettuce (4)

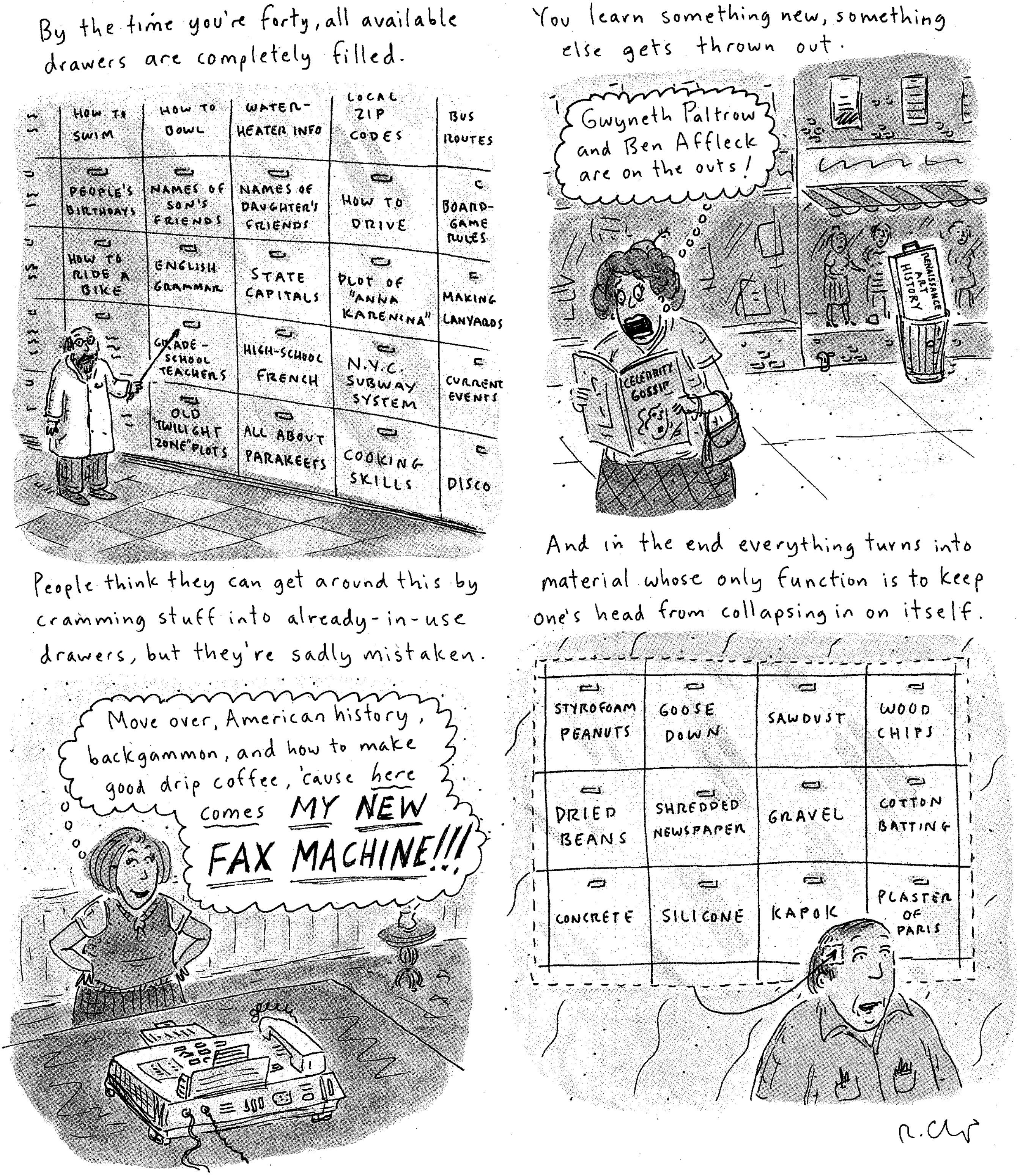
• •

The solution to puzzle No. 78 appears on page 79. For a free copy of "The New Yorker's Guide to Solving Cryptic Crosswords," please send your fax number or a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "Solvers' Guide," The New Yorker, 20 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036. For an electronic version, send an E-mail to puzzleguide@newyorker.com.

THE BACK PAGE

BY ROZ CHAST

INSIDE ONE'S MEMORY BANK



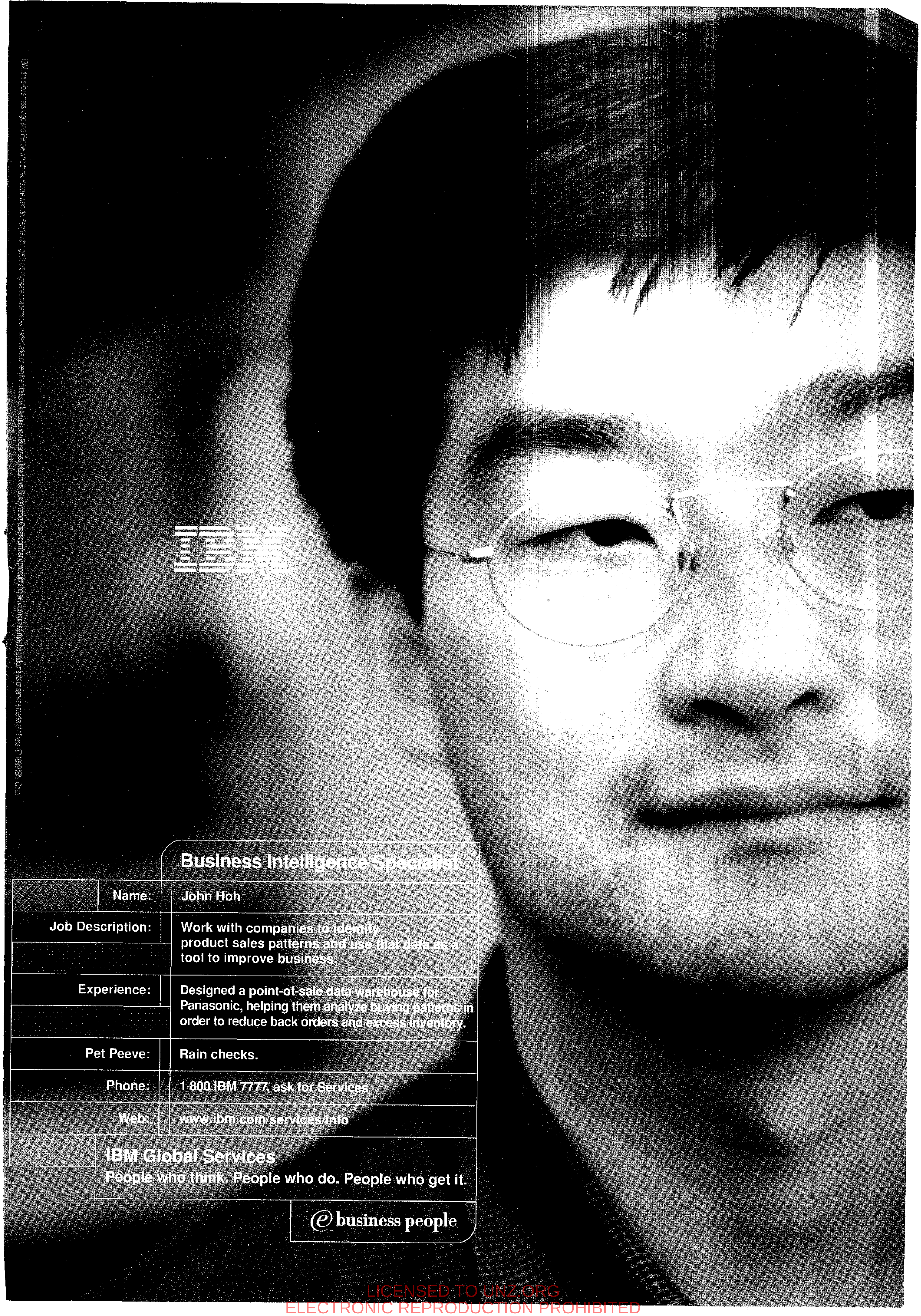
By the time you're forty, all available drawers are completely filled.

People think they can get around this by cramming stuff into already-in-use drawers, but they're sadly mistaken.

You learn something new, something else gets thrown out.

And in the end everything turns into material whose only function is to keep one's head from collapsing in on itself.

HOW TO SWIM
HOW TO BOWL
WATER-HEATER INFO
LOCAL ZIP CODES
BUS ROUTES
PEOPLE'S BIRTHDAYS
NAMES OF SON'S FRIENDS
NAMES OF DAUGHTER'S FRIENDS
HOW TO DRIVE
BOARD-GAME RULES
HOW TO RIDE A BIKE
ENGLISH GRAMMAR
STATE CAPITALS
PLOT OF "ANNA KARENINA"
MAKING LANYARDS
GRADE-SCHOOL TEACHERS
HIGH-SCHOOL FRENCH
N.Y.C. SUBWAY SYSTEM
CURRENT EVENTS
OLD "TWILIGHT ZONE" PLOTS
ALL ABOUT PARAKEETS
COOKING SKILLS
DISCO
Gwyneth Paltrow and Ben Affleck are on the outs!
CELEBRITY GOSSIP
RENAISSANCE ART HISTORY
Move over, American history, backgammon, and how to make good drip coffee, 'cause here comes MY NEW FAX MACHINE!!!
STYROFOAM PEANUTS
GOOSE DOWN
SAWDUST
WOOD CHIPS
DRIED BEANS
SHREDDED NEWSPAPER
GRAVEL
COTTON BATTING
CONCRETE
SILICONE
KAPOK
PLASTER OF PARIS



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9-5

DO BABY SEATS AND TURBOCHARGERS MIX?

Your child's first car trip. You drove home from the hospital, overwhelmed by a strange and powerful instinct to protect. Now, it's a run to your child's activity du jour. In a turbocharged Saab 9-5, that means quick acceleration when passing or merging. Which is as much about safety as it is about power. If you're a parent, the 9-5 is for you. And, if you listen to your instincts, for your children, too.

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